AFGHANISTAN
Women's Role in Afghanistan's Future –
Taking Stock of Achievements and Continued Challenges
ACS4474
Islamic State of Afghanistan
Social Development and Gender

AFGHANISTAN

Women’s Role in Afghanistan’s Future –
Taking Stock of Achievements and Continued Challenges

SASDS
SOUTH ASIA
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Annex I: Key Areas for Future Research/Data Collection
This report was prepared by a team led by Asta Olesen (SASDS) with support from Rebecca Lynn Haines (Consultant), Najla Sabri (SASDA), and Samuel Hall Consulting. Support and early comments were also received from sector colleagues working in the Afghanistan Country Team. The report benefited from a series of organizations and individuals who made time to be interviewed, including the Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization, the Aga Khan Foundation, BRAC, Building Markets, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Concern Worldwide, the International Center for Women’s Economic Empowerment, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, the International Rescue Committee, Kim Motley (Esq.), Medica Afghanistan, Oxfam, Save the Children, the UNAMA Police Advisory Unit, and the United Nations Fund for Population Affairs.

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This report constitutes a synthesis of existing information collected from various sources ranging from the databases of several line ministries, independent evaluations and assessments, and the NRVA 2007/08. As data was compiled during 2013, the report has used the latest NRVA to be published at that time. However, the 2011/12 NRVA was published in January 2014, which provides additional relevant data. The report is building upon the World Bank Country Gender Assessment prepared in 2005 - Afghanistan: National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction – The Role of Women in Afghanistan’s Future and attempts to the extent possible to identify the achievements and gains towards gender equity since 2005. The report is not a policy document, but constitutes input for the Government and international community in the ongoing debate on women’s role in a post-transition Afghanistan. The challenge now is to sustain the achievements, and in partnership between the Government of Afghanistan and the donor community, to provide practical and effective programs that will ensure women’s continued and increased participation in shaping Afghanistan’s future.

Kabul, February 2014
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFD</td>
<td>Agence Francaise de Developpement</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIHRC</td>
<td>Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMICS</td>
<td>Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey</td>
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<td>AMS</td>
<td>Afghan Mortality Survey</td>
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<td>ANA</td>
<td>Afghan National Army</td>
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<td>ANDS</td>
<td>Afghanistan National Development Strategy</td>
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<td>Afghan National Police</td>
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<td>AREDP</td>
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<td>AREU</td>
<td>Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit</td>
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<td>ARTF</td>
<td>Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund</td>
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<td>AusAID</td>
<td>Australian Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>BHC</td>
<td>Basic Health Center</td>
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<td>BPHS</td>
<td>Basic Package of Health Services</td>
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<td>BPRM</td>
<td>Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration</td>
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<td>CDC</td>
<td>Community Development Council</td>
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<td>CHC</td>
<td>Comprehensive Health Center</td>
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<td>Community Health Worker</td>
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<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
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<td>CMAM</td>
<td>Comprehensive Management of Acute Malnutrition</td>
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<td>Central Statistics Organization</td>
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<td>Danish International Development Agency</td>
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<td>District Coordination Council</td>
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<td>District Development Assembly</td>
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<td>Department for International Development (UK)</td>
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<td>District Hospital</td>
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<td>Department of Women’s Affairs</td>
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<td>Education Management Information System</td>
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<td>EQUIP</td>
<td>Education Quality Improvement Program</td>
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<td>EVAW</td>
<td>Elimination of Violence Against Women</td>
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<td>FHH</td>
<td>Female-headed Household</td>
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<td>FRU</td>
<td>Family Response Units</td>
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<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>Gender Inequality Index</td>
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<td>Health Management Information System</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>HP</td>
<td>Health Post</td>
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<td>IARCSC</td>
<td>Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission</td>
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<td>Injection Drug Users</td>
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<td>IEC</td>
<td>Independent Election Commission</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labor Organization</td>
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<td>Korea International Cooperation Agency</td>
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<td>Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock</td>
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<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>Management of Information Systems</td>
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<td>Microfinance Investment Facility for Afghanistan</td>
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<td>MMR</td>
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<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>Ministry of Higher Education</td>
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<td>Ministry of Interior</td>
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<td>MoJ</td>
<td>Ministry of Justice</td>
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<td>Ministry of Women’s Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSM</td>
<td>Men Who Have Sex with Men</td>
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<td>NABDP</td>
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<td>NAPWA</td>
<td>National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan</td>
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<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<td>NERS</td>
<td>Nutrition Education and Rehabilitation Sessions</td>
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<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organizations</td>
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<td>National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment</td>
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<td>NSDP</td>
<td>National Skills Development and Market Linkages Program</td>
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<td>National Solidarity Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>NZAID</td>
<td>New Zealand Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>PC</td>
<td>Provincial Council</td>
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<td>REACH</td>
<td>Rural Expansion of Afghanistan’s Community-based Healthcare project</td>
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<tr>
<td>RUTF</td>
<td>Ready to Use Therapeutic Foods</td>
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<td>SHARP</td>
<td>Strengthening Health Activities for the Rural Poor</td>
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<td>SBA</td>
<td>Skilled Birth Attendant</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIDA</td>
<td>Swedish International Development Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNTV</td>
<td>Single Non-transferrable Vote</td>
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<td>SOP</td>
<td>Standard Operating Procedure</td>
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<td>SV</td>
<td>Stichting Vluchtelin</td>
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<td>Traditional Dispute Resolution</td>
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<td>Teacher Training College</td>
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<td>TVET</td>
<td>Technical and Vocational Education and Training</td>
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<td>UNAMA</td>
<td>United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan</td>
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<td>United States Institute of Peace</td>
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Executive Summary

Women's rights, development, and participation in society have been at the forefront of international involvement in Afghanistan since 2001. The Government of Afghanistan has made a series of critical commitments to women, including espousing equality in its Constitution, signing up to international conventions on gender issues, integrating gender concerns throughout its core national development strategy documents, and promoting services for women within many of its key service delivery programs. Many international actors have been particularly concerned to see gender issues addressed, and have made women's issues central to the objectives of their aid commitments to Afghanistan. In some sectors, these commitments have been translated into demonstrable progress for women; this progress can be unpacked and learned from, and considered for expansion, cross-sectoral learning, and replication. In other sectors, advancement is less visible and requires reexamination and a refocusing of effort to address obstacles to progress for women.

This report assesses the overall situation of women in Afghanistan across key sectors, acting as a follow-up to the report published by the World Bank in 2005, entitled Afghanistan: National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction –
Role of Women in Afghanistan’s Future. In 2005, reliable data on girls and women was difficult to find in every sector, but the report relied on a range of information sources, including qualitative studies and NGO initiatives, to compile a picture reflecting women’s issues as they stood at that time. In 2013, there is more data available in some sectors, and more studies and analytical work have been produced in the intervening years, which help to round out the picture in each sector. That said, certain sectors or sub-themes still lack comprehensive quantitative data, particularly as related to women’s employment practices and women’s justice issues. Areas where the lack of comprehensive data is especially acute are identified in Annex 1 (p.167).

This report has relied on national databases and quantitative surveys (where they exist), qualitative and perception-based surveys, program evaluations, qualitative research conducted in focused sites around the country, and a series of key interviews with donors, government departments, UN agencies, NGOs, and civil society actors. Key sources that have informed this report include the Health Management Information System (HMIS) at the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and the Education Management Information System (EMIS) at the Ministry of Education (MoE); data tracked by the Central Statistics Organization (CSO); large surveys including the Afghanistan Mortality Survey (AMS), the Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (AMICS), and the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA); and a series of smaller focused information sources relevant to one or more chapters.

The World Bank’s programming, through support of key international donors, has made a significant contribution to most sectors covered in this report. Programming such as the National Solidarity Program (NSP), Strengthening Health Activities for the Rural Poor (SHARP) with the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS), the Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP), the Microfinance Investment Facility for Afghanistan (MISFA), the Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Program (AREDP), and the Horticulture and Livestock Program (HLP), are all examples of World Bank-supported programs and facilities, implemented in partnership with the Government of Afghanistan, that are making a difference for Afghan women.

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What can be seen from the sectoral chapters included in this report is that, in sectors where concerted and coordinated efforts have been made among a collection of key actors (including the Government of Afghanistan, the donor community, NGOs and civil society), significant improvements have been achieved. Where well-planned systems have been designed, and consensus has been garnered for the support of these systems, services are indeed reaching more women and girls, and communities are becoming more accepting of these services (most notably in health, education, and in the National Solidarity Program, respectively discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, and under the Community Governance sub-heading in Chapter 5). What is also shown in the report is the innovative function that NGOs and civil society actors have played in some of the sectors discussed, developing new mechanisms to include and reach women, which have in many ways acted as models of good practices to be considered for replication.

The report also highlights areas in which significant improvement has been lacking, and a systematic approach to addressing some issues is still missing. The prevailing lack of reliable data makes understanding the issues faced by women in these sectors challenging. This is most pronounced in the justice sector (Chapter 5), but can also be seen in the chapter exploring women’s employment (Chapter 4). Each chapter in the report concludes by distilling key recommendations for the future, whether based on successes to date, or based on a lack of progress and critical gaps in specific areas.

**Health.** One of the sectors where the most notable progress has been made is in health. The key advances for women in the health sector since 2005 include: a lower maternal mortality ratio; a lower fertility rate; an increase in qualified female health professionals; and a far wider network of health facilities capable of providing reproductive healthcare. In order to further these advances, key areas of focus should be: further expanding the healthcare system, such that uncovered areas gain access to proximate facilities; investing further in health human resources while incentivizing work in rural areas, such that more women can access health professionals (especially female staff) closer to their homes; and a coordinated national effort on the nutritional issues of women and children, an area that has not been strongly addressed to date. For more information and further recommendations on the health sector, see Chapter 2 (p. 58-9).
Education. Another sector that has seen notable progress for girls is education. The number of girls attending school at each level of education has increased significantly, particularly at primary level, with more modest increases at secondary and tertiary levels. The expansion of the Government’s network of schools has been remarkable, and there has also been an increase in the number of female teachers, a factor that has an impact on girls’ school attendance, especially in higher grades. In order to maintain this momentum and address some of the prevailing barriers to girls’ education, key areas of focus include: supporting girls through transition years and into higher grades and tertiary education opportunities (including teacher training); further expanding and improving education infrastructure and a transportation system, such that proximate access to adequate facilities improves; and expanding innovative education models to support girls to attend school regularly and safely. For a detailed discussion and further recommendations on the education sector, see Chapter 3 (p.89-90).

Work and Employment. Related to women in employment, the picture is less clear. Women tend to be employed in informal work that is often home-based, or takes place as an unremunerated contribution to the agricultural sector. They continue to be under-represented in other areas, such as in the private sector and as public servants. Qualified female professionals in social sector jobs (like health and education) have increased but are still scarce, and are a critical need for improving the delivery of social services to women. One area of success appears to be in microfinance, where women have readily participated and repayment rates are typically strong. In order to improve women’s employment opportunities, policymakers and program designers should: support agricultural value chains (or portions of value chains) where women’s contribution is strongest and most valued; strengthen quotas and incentives for women to participate in the public sector and in social service delivery roles; and target key barriers to women’s employment (i.e. childcare, mobility, etc.). For an in-depth discussion of women’s employment issues, see Chapter 4 (p.93); for a discussion of female health human resources and female teachers, see Chapter 2 (p.51) and Chapter 3 (p.76), respectively.

Legal Rights and Voice. Finally, the report addresses women’s access to justice and public voice. While in the latter area, some space for women has been created and significant participation garnered, the former remains one of the areas of greatest need. Change in women’s access to justice is very difficult to measure, but it is clear that violence against women is widespread. Crimes
against women are under-reported due to social stigma, and crimes which are reported are most often handled through local informal dispute resolution mechanisms, largely applying customary laws. Though some positive formal legal reforms have been adopted, their application is inconsistent at best. Women are severely underrepresented as professionals in the legal system, making access to justice even more difficult for female victims. Much is needed to address issues of violence and access to justice: in the near term, more support is needed for providers of legal aid and emergency response for victims, and the reach of these services must expand. However, these are short-term solutions; in the long-term, thorough education on legal protections for women for all those involved in the legal process (including local justice bodies and police), as well as a more reliable and accessible judiciary, are critical. In addition, better data and qualitative information is especially needed in this sector.

Also in Chapter 5 (p.138), the report explores issues of women’s voice. Women have been participating in the political process at unprecedented rates, both by turning out for voting, and by running as candidates in presidential, parliamentary, and provincial elections. Women’s participation in unofficial local governance and development bodies has also increased. However, evidence from the most recent elections and other studies demonstrates that their gains are restricted due to threats of violence and other barriers, including the apparent misapplication of quota systems. Elections-related provisions for women (both voters and candidates) require review and strengthening, and women’s meaningful participation in community-based leadership must be continually improved and strengthened. Chapter 5 explores women’s voice and makes recommendations for expanding their participation in public life.

**Cross-cutting Challenges**

While specific issues can be identified as critical within each of the above sectors, what is also notable is that some issues cut across all sectors as prevailing barriers for women. One of these consistent themes is that the lack of female professionals in key areas (namely in health, education, and justice) poses a barrier to other women and girls accessing these services. When a woman is able to access a public service from another qualified woman, she is more likely to be candid about her problems, access services more consistently, receive more detailed information relevant to her situation, and...
gain more community and family support to access that service. A lack of professional women has a negative downstream effect on other women. Support for increasing educated and professionally qualified women is therefore a particularly strategic investment, given its potential to have a positive multiplier effect across sectors.

Another cross-cutting impediment for women is insecurity, or the perception of insecurity. With a long history of security concerns which have affected most villages in the country at some point or another, many areas of Afghanistan have become highly restrictive of the movements of girls and women. From girls dropping out of school on account of not being allowed to walk, to female political candidates receiving threats and intimidation to remove themselves from political races, girls and women are restricted from services, opportunities, and participation due to a climate of insecurity.

Although it has been treated in Chapter 5 in particular, violence against women is also a cross-cutting issue. High levels of violence against women can generate a severe physical and psychological impact. Coupled with the accompanying social stigma, violence against women impedes women’s ability to access services and pursue opportunities across sectors.

In each chapter, issues of regional inequality and disparity between rural and urban areas can be seen across key indicators. This inequality is related to remoteness, insecurity, the availability of qualified human resources in a given area, and the uneven distribution of resources, among other factors. What is clear is that some provinces are far better provided for with social services than others, and that urban areas generally provide higher levels of services and opportunities than rural areas. While urban areas are typically better served than rural areas in most countries, the gap in Afghanistan is extreme. These disparities can fuel instability and conflict, and must be systematically factored into program design and policy-making, in order to close these existing gaps.

In addition, barriers such as a lack of mobility, limited transportation options, inadequate infrastructure that omits women-friendly features, and the prevalence of early marriage, tend to be repetitive cross-cutting barriers in many sectors. Special attention to these issues should be paid regardless of which sectoral programming is being considered.
Finally, the report ends with a Conclusion chapter (Chapter 6, p.157), framed through the lens of the upcoming transition years in Afghanistan, when the Government of Afghanistan will take over more and more direct management of services and security. These are critical years for women – for their development and access to services, as well as their participation and decision-making power in an evolving Afghan society. It is critical that advances for women are identified, analyzed, and deliberately supported and expanded during these years, in order to consolidate and maintain the gains that have been made, and to build on these gains to steadily improve women's place in a post-transition Afghanistan. Chapter 6 summarizes gender issues in this context and makes recommendations for maintaining momentum on women's place in Afghanistan's development through the transition years.
Chapter 1: Introduction
Chapter 1: Introduction

In Afghanistan, the role of women and their position in the society are inextricably interlinked with the national destiny. Women are symbols of family honor but also carry the burden of embodying the national honor and aspirations of the country. Gender has thus been one of the most politicized issues in Afghanistan over the past 100 years, where many reform attempts rightly or wrongly have been condemned by opponents as un-Islamic and a challenge to the sanctity of the faith and family. Notions of honor and shame underpinning cultural norms and practices emphasize female modesty and purity and define men as breadwinners and the protectors of the family. In 1929, the reformist king Amanullah's government fell soon after he tried to impose social reforms, including the abolition of purdah (separation and veiling of women) and establishment of coeducation.²

The above quote from the World Bank Country Gender Assessment from 2005, *Afghanistan: National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction – The Role of Women in Afghanistan’s Future*, reflects that the question of women’s role in

² Ibid, 5.
society has been a highly contested area for policy-makers in Afghanistan for almost a century and continues to be so. Following the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghan political leaders laid the path for specific attention to the role of women through the Bonn Agreement (2001), and then confirmed this path through the 2004 Constitution’s recognition that “[a]ny kind of discrimination and privilege between the citizens of Afghanistan are prohibited” and “[t]he citizens of Afghanistan – whether man or woman – have equal rights and duties before the law.” Subsequently, The Afghanistan National Development Strategy 2008-2013 (ANDS), identifying gender equality as a cross-cutting issue, set out policies, outcomes and benchmarks for measuring progress in the subsequent years. The core strategy for women's advancement was defined as “gender mainstreaming” in the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan 2008-2018 (NAPWA). However, the gap in gender equity is not easily closed and in 2012, Afghanistan still ranked 175th out of 187 countries in the UN's Human Development Index (HDI), and 147th out of 148 countries ranked in the 2012 Gender Inequality Index (GII). While the HDI ranking is the same as for 2011, the GII ranking has dropped from 141.

The gender equity gap in Afghanistan has been high on the agenda of the international community since 2001, and in the preparations for the transition of international forces by 2014, expected to be accompanied with a decline in external aid, both national and international observers are voicing concerns that the future for Afghan women could be negatively affected by both the socio-economic and political impact of transition.

**Gender Equality and Development – Global and National Priorities**

The 2012 World Development Report (WDR), *Gender Equality and Development*, highlighted the dramatic changes taking place across all regions in terms of progress towards gender equality. Building on cross-country data collection and analysis (with new field work from 19 countries including Afghanistan), the WDR focuses on the economics of gender equality and development in order to gain insights into how key gender outcomes emerge and evolve as the development process unfolds. It also explores the role of

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policy in influencing these outcomes. The WDR pointed to four policy priorities for gender equality:

- reducing gender gaps in human capital – specifically those that address female mortality and education;
- closing gender gaps in access to economic opportunities, earnings, and productivity;
- shrinking gender difference in voice and agency within society; and
- limiting the reproduction of gender inequality across generations.

The recently released Asia Foundation survey *Afghanistan in 2012: Survey of the Afghan People* reported continued high support for gender equality as nearly 9 in 10 respondents (87%) agreed that women and men should have equal educational opportunities. Two thirds of the surveyed people were of the view that women should be allowed to work outside the home; however, there was a substantial difference between men’s and women’s attitudes in this regard. Four fifths of female respondents (80%) said women should be allowed to work outside the home, compared to just over half (55%) of men who say so. Significantly more urban respondents agreed (81%) than their rural counterparts (61%). The support for allowing women to work outside the home has been steadily falling – from 71% in 2006 to 66% in 2012. The reason for these apparently changing views is unclear, but security concerns could be a key factor.

Assessing women’s situation overall, almost one third of respondents (29%) identify lack of education and/or illiteracy as the biggest problem faced by women. After that, 10% cite the lack of rights/women’s rights, 8% refer to domestic violence, 6% to forced marriage/dowry/bride price issues, 5% to general healthcare, and 4% to poverty. Since 2006, a lack of education and prevailing illiteracy rates have consistently been identified as the biggest problems for women in Afghanistan.

**Evolution in Policy, Religious Guidance, and Institutional Frameworks to Advance Women's Status**

The Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) was established by the Bonn Agreement and was tasked by the interim and transitional governments of
Afghanistan with responsibility for advancing the role of women. Since 2001, MoW A has had 4 ministers, and currently has 9 central departments and 34 provincial departments. Its activities are regulated by Presidential Decree No. 26 of 24 May 2004, according to which it holds the responsibility to implement political and social policies of the Government in order to secure and expand the legal rights of women. Implementation of the gender strategies in the ANDS and other policy instruments on women is in principle facilitated through MoWA’s NAPWA, which outlines support to all ministries in incorporating gender into their respective planning, policy-making, programming, and budgeting, and supports other public agencies and institutions with the same.  

With support from MoWA, 22 line ministries have established Gender Units, and a number have developed sectoral gender strategies and hired Gender Advisors or Gender Focal Points for specific projects or overall ministerial guidance, in order to be able to live up to some of the commitments in the ANDS and NAPWA. The Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC) has, together with MoWA, developed a Gender Equality Policy for the civil service, conducted gender awareness training, and set a target of 30% women for the civil service. This initiative is discussed further in Chapter 4, p.108.

In the legislative field, the most noticeable initiative since 2005 has been the passing by Presidential Decree of the law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW Law), under discussion in Parliament at the time of publication of this report. This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Along with the formal legal system, the religious establishment develops positions and issues guidance on the legal framework for women and men in Afghanistan. In March 2012, the national Council of Ulema issued a 3-page declaration, outlining rights women enjoy under Islam and explaining the associated responsibilities of women. Among the rights were listed the right to property, ownership and commerce; the right to inheritance according to Shari’a, the right to mahr (dowry) as her exclusive property, and the right to choose a spouse according to her own will. The declaration noted that forcibly marrying an adult woman is not allowed, although consultation with the guardians – which is a religious rule – is practiced. Exchanging a woman as compensation for murder, or for establishing peace, or exchanging two women

in marriage, is forbidden, and a wife cannot be inherited. The Ulema Council also listed women’s duties and obligations, which comprise complete observance of the hijab, avoiding mingling with strange men in various social situations such as education, shopping, the office and other affairs of life, avoiding travelling without a mahram, and the acceptance of polygamy as religiously sanctioned. Further, the declaration noted that in ‘consideration of the clarity of verses 1 and 34 of Surah an-Nisa’ [of the Qur’an], men are fundamental and women are secondary; also, lineage is derived from the man. Therefore, the use of words and expressions that contradict the sacred verses must be strictly avoided.’ The Ulema Council proceeded to request the judicial and law enforcement organs of the country to punish, in accordance with Shari‘a and national laws, the perpetrators of any kind of assault (teasing, harassment, and beating) against women, without a Shari‘a compliant reason.

The above pronouncement caused considerable debate not least because of the pronouncement of women’s ‘secondary’ position, which was seen by many as running counter to the constitutionally defined gender equality which is also spelled out in numerous national policies and strategies. In addition, the stress on gender segregation in public life, of hijab and the requirement of a mahram, were also seen as an attempt to curtail women’s rights.

On the other hand, the Ulema Council’s declaration clearly highlighted a number of inalienable rights for women, which are identified in this report as essential for sustaining women’s rights and for releasing their potential in support of national development. Among these are women’s rights to property, ownership and commerce, which in numerous studies have been identified as key constraints to women’s economic empowerment. Further, the declaration strongly pronounced forcible marriage and a range of widespread customs and practices as haram, and thus clearly religiously forbidden. Women’s right to education was assumed (avoiding co-education) and finally, it was reiterated that violence against women (outside of Shari‘a) was punishable by law.

This pronouncement typifies the position of women in Afghanistan in many ways – in its demonstration of the opportunities for reform, its recognition of women’s subjugation under traditional and common extra-judicial practices, but also its position within a contested space on women’s place in society, and its ability to call to mind the overlapping legal frameworks and worldviews that affect Afghan women. What is clear is how critical it is to engage the religious establishment through Afghanistan’s transition, in discussions on
gender roles and in the promotion of the rights, opportunities, and the inclusion of women.

**The Millennium Development Goals**

Afghanistan has also defined its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to be achieved by 2020. However, in many cases, there are major obstacles to reaching these goals by this date. The below table is a reflection of selected goals that significantly impact on women, along with the 2010 assessment of their status up until that point.

<p>| Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals Report 2010 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>GOAL</th>
<th>MDG TARGET</th>
<th>Assessment (2010)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal 2</td>
<td>Achieve universal primary education</td>
<td>Target: Ensure that, by 2020, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling</td>
<td>Radical improvements achieved but close to half of school-aged children are not yet enrolled in school and educational parity between boys and girls remains challenging</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Goal 3 | Promote gender equality and empower women | a) Eliminate gender disparity in all levels of education no later than 2020  
b) Reduce gender disparity in economic areas by 2020  
c) Increase female participation in elected and appointed bodies at all levels of governance to 30% by 2020  
d) Reduce gender disparity in access to justice by 50% by 2015 and completely (100%) by 2020 | Potential to achieve the goal is low |
| Goal 4 | Reduce child mortality | Reduce by 50%, between 2003 and 2015, the under-5 mortality rate, and further reduce it to 1/3 of the 2003 level by 2020 | Improvements achieved but Afghanistan remains one of the countries with highest infant mortality rates |
| Goal 5 | Improve maternal health | Reduce by 50% between 2002 and 2015 the maternal mortality ratio (MMR), and further reduce the MMR to 25% of the 2002 level by 2020 | Some improvements but Afghanistan remains in the lowest category in its maternal health situation |
Although the MDGs reflect the huge developmental problems Afghanistan is facing, the lack of security is seen by most as the most pervasive issue facing the country. This view is substantiated in the Asia Foundation Survey,\(^8\) where the people surveyed identified insecurity including attacks, violence, and terrorism (28%), unemployment (27%), and corruption (25%), as the 3 biggest problems facing Afghanistan as a whole. Nearly half (48%) of those surveyed reported fearing (often or sometimes) for their personal safety or for that of their families.

**The 2005 World Bank Country Gender Assessment**

Since resuming its Afghanistan program in 2002, in alignment with government policy, the World Bank has made considerable efforts to incorporate gender across its portfolio of projects in Afghanistan, including lending operations and analytical work, with a view to leveraging its investment project portfolio to maximize its impact on the lives of Afghan women.

The 2005 Country Gender Assessment established the Bank’s country-level gender mainstreaming strategy as follows:

1. Strengthening women’s involvement and remuneration in agricultural and livestock production (extension and training, credit facilities, market opportunities);
2. Developing socially acceptable skilled and unskilled employment opportunities in the urban sector in response to the high incidence of poor female-headed households;
3. Collecting adequate sex-disaggregated data across all sectors to enable monitoring of future developments and effects of investments;
4. Enabling legal reforms to remove gender inequities; and
5. Substantially increasing women’s employment in the health and education sectors, thereby directly and positively affecting girls’ school enrollment, female access to health services, maternal mortality, and general child and family health.

In addition to operationalizing the above areas in ongoing programming, these points have been studied through a range of tools and research approaches commissioned by the World Bank. For example, the National Risk and

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Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) collects national level gender disaggregated data on a wide range of issues. On a more qualitative scale, one series of studies has focused on constraints to girls’ education, while others have addressed women’s role in agriculture and access to micro-finance. Other areas addressed have been women’s voice in local level governance as manifested in their participation in the National Solidarity Program, as well as gender perspectives on rural access and mobility. Finally, a comprehensive study on “Gender Outcomes in Formal and Informal Justice Systems” is currently ongoing.

In operations, the mainstreaming of gender perspectives and programming has followed a strategy of “picking the low-hanging fruit”, building opportunities where tangible gains could be made in the near-term, by strengthening women’s involvement in the sectors where they already had a socially accepted presence. Simultaneously, programming has worked to slowly expand the borders of what is considered socially acceptable, allowing for new interventions in critical areas. While significant achievements in reducing gender gaps have been made over the 8 years since the previous report, progress is uneven across sectors, between regions, and among social groups, as well as between rural and urban areas.

Objectives and Scope of the 2013 Gender Stocktaking Report

Building on the 2005 Country Gender Assessment, the objective of this report is to assess progress in addressing gender issues across sectors and identify critical areas where gaps or obstacles to gender-responsive actions still hamper growth, poverty reduction, and human well-being. A wider objective is

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12 Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Sippi. “A Study of Gender Equity through the National Solidarity Program’s Community Development Councils.” (Kabul: DACAAR, 2009). NSP impact on gender is also covered in the NSP III Impact Evaluation.

to highlight, both to the Government of Afghanistan and to donors, key challenges to sustaining gender achievements in view of potential institutional and policy changes and expected aid reduction. The report will also provide guidance on any gender-related activities or areas that, in the above context, may be critical for the World Bank, donors, and the Government of Afghanistan to consider supporting, whether in the form of analytical work or technical assistance.

**Methodology and Sources**

The report comprises an update on the 2005 report across the same sectors (health, education, work and employment, legal rights and voice). Like its predecessor, it is based on a compilation of available data across key sectors. In 2005, little research and national level data collection had taken place for several decades, resulting in gaps in systematic knowledge about gender relations beyond anecdotal evidence. The situation is somewhat improved today, with the availability of the NRVA, the comprehensive AMS from 2010, the NSP Impact Assessment, the comprehensive Management of Information Systems (MIS) in a number of World Bank-funded projects and line ministries, and the analytical work of the World Bank and other key actors.

Preparation for the report involved comparisons among a series of available sources, including the major national sources named above, and a set of smaller, more qualitative research sources that round out, corroborate, or modify what is learned from national surveys and databases. In addition, a series of key informant interviews were undertaken with actors in the Government, international community, among NGOs, and in Afghan civil society, in order to learn more about initiatives, approaches, and perspectives from programmers and implementers operating in various parts of Afghanistan. Once a draft was prepared, a workshop organized by MoWA was held in Kabul in May 2013, presenting the draft report to representatives from line ministries, and a further consultation was held with members of the donor community in June 2013. Major points from these discussions have been captured in the final version of this report.

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14 The NRVA 2007/08 is used, since 2011/12 data were not yet available at the time of writing. Further, NRVA 2007/08 and NRVA 2011/12 are not immediately comparable due to differences in methodology.
Chapter 2: Health
Chapter 2: Health

Since 2002, the Government of Afghanistan and a series of other actors have undertaken a set of large-scale interventions aimed at improving the country's very poor health statistics. The pre-existing health indicators in the country were particularly dire for women; therefore many of these interventions have targeted female beneficiaries and focused on the specific health needs and challenges of women in Afghanistan. As can be expected, a good deal of this effort has been focused on issues of maternal health and family planning, while other initiatives have sought to address health infrastructure, health human resources, nutrition, and mental health, to name a few.

Consequently, the health environment in Afghanistan has improved in some critical areas since the previous report in 2005. This is particularly the case for women, for whom the baseline was especially low. Indeed, even accounting for different methodological approaches and a lack of data in 2005, it is clear that there have been notable improvements across several significant indicators: life expectancy has increased for both women and men, fertility rates have declined, and both infant and maternal mortality rates have decreased. These improvements are reflected in the following key measurements:
Closely related to these improvements, the number of health facilities has increased significantly since 2005 across the country. There are now 2,047 health facilities of varying levels that make up the national health system, as compared to 1,214 in 2005. In addition, there are a number of private health facilities operating in the country as well. Although the trajectory indicated by the above statistics is encouraging, gender inequality is still recognized as one of the main issues in the health sector in Afghanistan, and overall indicators are still low by global standards. Using data gathered from MoPH and a series of other national sources, the trends cited above, along with continuing gaps and challenges for women’s health, will be explored further in this chapter.

For a comparison of similar data points dating back to 1960, see the World Bank’s 2005 report: *Afghanistan: National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction – the Role of Women in Afghanistan’s Future.*


Ibid, 123.

Ibid, 40.


Ibid, vi.

Ibid, vi.

Ibid, vi.

Gender Differences in Mortality

Life expectancy in Afghanistan is low for both men and women but has steadily improved since 2004. In 2004, the HDI listed the average life expectancy at birth for men and women as 43.1.\(^{26}\) In 2008, the MoPH published life expectancy figures of 47 years for men and 45 years for women,\(^{27}\) and the World Health Organization’s (WHO) figures gathered in 2009 record life expectancy as 47 years for men and 50 years for women.\(^{28}\) Most recently, the 2010 AMS reports that life expectancy is 63.6 years for men and 64.2 years for women.\(^{29}\) Compared to data for the broader region, life expectancy by sex for Pakistan and Iran are as follows: 64.2 for men and 67.9 for women in Pakistan,\(^{30}\) and in Iran, 68.6 for men and 71.6 for women.\(^{31}\) One reason for the improvement in Afghan women’s life expectancy is that mortality ratios for women aged 15-49 have fallen dramatically since 2000 (dropping from 103/1,000 to 52/1,000).\(^{32}\)

This positive trend in Afghanistan is encouraging; however, mortality rates are still high and a breakdown of causes demonstrates gender differentials that are instructive.

![Graph 1: Causes of Death](source: AMS 2010)

\(^{29}\)The AMS is the first nationwide health survey, while previous estimates were based on more localized sampling, partly explaining the significant shift in data.
The greatest proportion of deaths in Afghanistan is due to communicable diseases, maternal/perinatal conditions, and nutrition-related conditions. Looking specifically at the causes of death among women, the most common causes of death are: infections and parasitic diseases (18%), cardiovascular diseases (18%), respiratory infections (15%) and maternal/perinatal conditions (17%). Maternal conditions account for 1 in 5 deaths among women aged 15-59.33

**Maternal and Child Mortality**

A series of causes can result in maternal mortality, with some clear trends as demonstrated in the below graph:

![Graph 2: Causes of Maternal Deaths](image)

(Source: AMS 2010)

Tracking improvements in levels of maternal mortality is difficult due to an historical lack of comprehensive data. The most frequently cited maternal mortality ratio until 2010 was 1,600 fatalities per 100,000 live births among women of reproductive age. However, this data was gathered from only four provinces (Kabul, Laghman, Badakhshan and Kandahar), and extrapolated as a representative national figure. Recent figures, on the other hand, are derived from surveys that gained broader coverage, designed with the aim of being more nationally representative. In these studies, maternal mortality ratios are cited as 327 per 100,000 live births,34 and 460 per 100,000 live births.35 36 In

34 Ibid, 129.
36 While neither of these sources was able to cover every district of Afghanistan due to insecurity, they represent the most comprehensive data collected in Afghanistan to date. The previous figure (1,600) was based on a limited sample area, while
comparison, maternal mortality in Pakistan is 260/100,000,\textsuperscript{37} while Iran has a ratio of 21/100,000.\textsuperscript{38}

Major factors in generating these changes are likely to be improvements in two main areas:

1. **Antenatal Care**: The number of women receiving antenatal care (at least once during pregnancy) from a skilled health worker has increased. According to the AMS, pregnant women participating in at least one antenatal visit rose from 57\% in the period 36-59 months (4 – 5 years) before the survey, to approximately 68\% at the time of the survey, in 2009/10.\textsuperscript{39} Approximately 3\% of these are with a Community Health Worker (CHW), while the remainder are with a doctor, nurse, or midwife. The gains in coverage were observed in both urban and rural areas, and represent a three-fold increase compared to 2003.\textsuperscript{40} Still, approximately 32\% of women receive no prenatal care linked to the healthcare system, and only 16\% of women reported having at least 4 antenatal visits,\textsuperscript{41} the minimum necessary to provide adequate screening for pregnancy complications.

2. **Attended Deliveries**: The NRVA's figures in 2007/8 found that 24\% of births were attended by a Skilled Birth Attendant (SBA).\textsuperscript{42} In the AMS, 32\% of children were delivered in a health facility.\textsuperscript{43} The AMICS report shows that 38.6\% of births were attended by a skilled professional.\textsuperscript{44} This increase has to do both with the decision of a couple to seek an attended birth, and the availability of qualified birth attendants, a point looked

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{37} “Pakistan.” Accessed 28 April 2013. \url{http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/pakistan}.
\textsuperscript{38} “Iran.” Accessed 28 April 2013. \url{http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/iran,-islamic-rep}.
\textsuperscript{39} *Afghanistan Mortality Survey*. (Kabul: Ministry of Public Health, 2010) 66.
\textsuperscript{40} ibid, 66.
\textsuperscript{41} ibid, 129.
\textsuperscript{42} ibid, 129.
\textsuperscript{43} ibid, 129.
\textsuperscript{44} ibid, 129.
\end{flushleft}
at in more depth under the sub-heading “Health Human Resources”, below. Table 2 analyzes the effect of a mother’s education levels and urban vs. rural residence, as factors that impact the choice to seek out an SBA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother's Education</th>
<th>Percentage Using a Skilled Birth Attendant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Education</td>
<td>AMS 2010 (Base: 16,998) 30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AMICS 2010/11 (Base: 4,865) 34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madrassa</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>77.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Percentage Using a Skilled Birth Attendant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>AMS 2010 (Base: 16,998) 70.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AMICS 2010/11 (Base: 4,865) 74.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table demonstrates, a more educated mother (especially in urban areas), is the most likely to use an SBA. Data was not available on the effect of the education levels of other members of the household (i.e. the father or the mother-in-law) on the use of SBAs.

**Box 1: Family Health Action Groups**

Various public health models have been used to provide increasing information to women on reproductive health. One interesting public health model that helps to reach women is the establishment and support to Family Health Action Groups, now a widely used model in Afghanistan. For example, through Save the Children (funded by UNICEF and AusAID), this model has been implemented starting in August 2011, in Istalif and Guldara districts of Kabul province and in Dehrawood district of Uruzgan, establishing 49 groups in total. These groups include the participation of 326 women, each responsible for outreach to 10 – 15 households. The groups are a venue for women to provide and exchange information with other women, aimed at increasing knowledge (and therefore outcomes) as related to birth preparedness, antenatal and postnatal information, and newborn care. Community Health Workers are trained to support the Family Health Action Groups, building sustainability into the model. In districts where this model is being implemented, Save the Children has seen a very strong interest by participating women in acting as advocates to other women on what they have learned about safe births. Most notably, in Istalif and Guldara, Save the Children has seen rates of attended births increase from 56.7% to 80.6%, indicating that these groups can be a highly successful model of awareness-raising and advocacy.

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While maternal mortality ratios are improving, they are still particularly poor among adolescent girls (aged 15 – 19). In Afghanistan, 14% of girls in this age bracket have begun childbearing, with an additional 2% who had a live birth prior to the age of 15 (with a likely higher percentage who were pregnant but did not have a live birth before 15). Some regions show particularly high rates of early child-bearing, namely the West, South, and Central Highlands. This issue is closely connected to the prevalence of early marriage; indications from anecdotal evidence and qualitative studies show a strong link between poverty and early marriage, as high bride prices help to offset debt payments or alleviate the poverty of a girl’s family.

Some of the complications reflected in Graph 2 above do not always cause fatalities (and are therefore not reflected in the statistics). However, birthing complications, such as prolonged or obstructed labor, which do not result in the death of the mother, can cause long-term health problems for women. The most severe of these long-term conditions is obstetric fistula, a fissure that forms in the vaginal wall to the bladder or rectum. Obstetric fistula is particularly common among girls who become mothers in their teenage years, and can also correlate to areas with high rates of under-nutrition, as it is linked to pelvic under-development. Obstetric fistula causes infection, reproductive health complications, and social alienation for women due to chronic incontinence and odor. At present, the only 2 facilities performing fistula repair operations are Malalai Maternity Hospital and CURE Hospital, both in Kabul.

As with maternal mortality, changes in child mortality are difficult to assess with complete confidence, given the dearth of early data and variations in methodology used. However, as the table below illustrates, most key sources show that the levels of under-five and infant mortality have progressively declined.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infant Mortality Rate</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>NRVA 2007/8</th>
<th>AMS 2010</th>
<th>AMICS 2010/11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>115</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fatalities/1,000 births</td>
<td>fatalities/1,000 births</td>
<td>fatalities/1,000 births</td>
<td>fatalities/1,000 births</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 5 Mortality Rate</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fatalities/1,000 births</td>
<td>fatalities/1,000 births</td>
<td>fatalities/1,000 births</td>
<td>fatalities/1,000 births</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the two most recent data sources, the AMS and AMICS figures are fairly close on this issue. Expressed by region, child mortality rates disaggregate in the below pattern:

Graph 3: Infant and Under 5 Mortality Rates by Region

(Source: AMICS 2010/11)

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Disaggregated by region of Afghanistan, the findings from the AMICS report illustrate that the highest rates of both infant and under-five mortality are in the West, Southeast, Central Highlands, and North. Again, one influential factor relates to the number of skilled health professionals available in each region, as compared to population size. This issue is explored more under the sub-heading “Health Human Resources”, below. While these figures represent steady improvement, they are still significantly higher than South Asian regional comparisons. The average Infant Mortality Rate for the South Asian region was 53/1,000 live births in 2010, where the Under-five Mortality Rate was 77/1,000 live births.53

An issue that has been identified as a serious problem in nearby countries is the sex ratio discrepancy at birth, resulting in a skewed overall demographic trend, where there are significantly more boys than girls. This is often related to the practice of sex-selective abortion, but can also include cases of female infanticide among other issues. According to data available on recorded births, the gender ratio at birth in Afghanistan is 115.7 males/100 females.54 This represents approximately 10% more boys than is considered natural (and is more pronounced in the South than any other region). However, there is no evidence of sex-selective abortion in Afghanistan; the skewed gender ratio most likely reflects the widespread practice of not registering births, especially those of girls. Differential treatment of female and male children after birth may have a gendered effect on the mortality rates.

**Fertility and Family Planning**

Encouragingly, the literature continues to record decreasing rates of fertility among Afghan women. In 2005, the fertility rate was 6.3.55 The most recent government figures placed the figure significantly lower in 2010 at 5.1.56 This compares to rates of 3.6 for Pakistan,57 1.7 for Iran,58 2.8 for India,59 and 3.2 for Tajikistan.60

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Commensurate to this decline in the fertility rate, the use of contraception is on the rise in Afghanistan. In 2005, only 5% of women aged 14-49 used any kind of contraception,\textsuperscript{61} while the AMICS from 2012 shows that more than 20% now use some form of modern contraception.\textsuperscript{62} This figure disaggregates widely by urban vs. rural areas, at 28% for urban areas, and 13% for rural areas. However, knowledge of contraception is still much higher than use. According to the AMS, approximately 90% of women knew of some contraception methods, with knowledge most widespread in the West and least in the Southeast.\textsuperscript{63} However, despite knowledge and an increase in use, the use of contraception is still low and fertility rates remain high.

There is a direct link between educational achievement, the use of contraception and fertility rates. Only a fifth (20%) of women with no education use contraception compared to 38% among women who have attained at least secondary education.\textsuperscript{64} In a similar vein, according to the AMS, fertility rates ranged from 5.3 among women with no education to 2.8 among women with higher education.\textsuperscript{65}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{Graph_4.png}
\caption{Fertility Rate by Educational Background}
\end{figure}

\textit{(Source: AMS 2010)}

\textsuperscript{60} “Tajikistan.” Accessed 28 April 2013. \url{http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/tajikistan}.
\textsuperscript{62} Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. (Kabul: UNICEF, 2012)\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{xl}}.
\textsuperscript{63} Afghanistan Mortality Survey. (Kabul: Ministry of Public Health, 2010) 54.
\textsuperscript{64} Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. (Kabul: UNICEF, 2012)\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{xl}}.
\textsuperscript{65} Afghanistan Mortality Survey. (Kabul: Ministry of Public Health, 2010) 41.
Other notable demographic differences in fertility rates include the variation in rates between urban and rural populations (4.7 and 5.2 respectively), the variations between the most and least remote quintiles (5.1 vs. 4.8), and the lowest and highest wealth quintiles (5.3 vs. 4.8). In terms of regional differences, the highest fertility rates are in the East and Southeast (at 5.6 and 5.5 respectively), while the lowest rates are in the Central Highlands and the South (at 4.6 and 4.7). Of course, if the birth of girls is underreported most commonly in the South as per the skewed sex ratio discussed in the “Maternal and Child Mortality” sub-section above, this could affect the fertility rates by approximately 5%.

Box 2: Accelerating Contraceptive Use

From 2004-06, Management Sciences for Health (MSH) implemented a Hewlett Foundation-funded family planning program called Accelerating Contraceptive Use, in partnership with MoPH and through 4 local implementing NGOs. The project sought innovative ways to increase levels of contraceptive use in specific locations, including selected districts in Ghazni, Herat, and Kabul provinces. During the program, they worked with 3,708 households, 35 health posts, and 65 Community Health Workers. MSH and partners employed a variety of approaches, including:

- Working with mullahs and partnering with them to provide information to communities;
- Using quotations from the Qu’ran on birth spacing when discussing contraception;
- Educating men and women about the correct use of contraceptives;
- Advocating two years of breastfeeding and pregnancy spacing;
- Communicating that oral contraceptives are safe and effective if used every day, and that fertility returns when stopped. Simple instructions for use were included.

The project found that the mullahs’ main concerns were typically about safety and infertility, rather than religion. By using some of the methods outlined above, all of the mullahs in this project accepted the concept of birth spacing using modern contraceptives. During the program, the use of contraception increased significantly, by between 24% and 27% in the project districts.

After its completion, Accelerating Contraceptive Use was used as a pilot project that was scaled up in a partnership between TechServe, USAID, and MoPH, and was implemented in all USAID-funded provinces in the health sector (within USAID’s REACH project). The REACH project increased contraceptive use from 16% to 26% over a period of two years in 13 provinces.

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66 Ibid, 42.
67 Ibid, 42.
Related to fertility issues is women’s menstrual health. Sanitary napkins are typically not used and not available, especially in rural areas. Because menstruation still often carries a strong taboo, it is difficult for many women to find appropriate means for cleaning and disposing of the garments being used. Without the ability to clean clothes and expose them to sunlight in the drying process, the cloth does not get adequately cleaned. The potential for reproductive tract infections is significant, even to the point of causing sterility. In some regional countries in South Asia, models have been developed to have locally produced sanitary napkins sold and distributed by women to other women. This could be one way to improve menstrual hygiene and prevent infections. In addition to supply, discrete, hygienic disposal methods are also critical, along with better information on hygienic cleaning methods, in order to protect women from reproductive complications caused by a lack of menstrual sanitation.

**Box 3: Expanding Access to Sanitary Feminine Products**

In Badakhshan province, Concern Worldwide – Afghanistan has created a mobile shop model to facilitate women’s ability to shop for themselves in rural areas. In areas where women cannot travel to shop for themselves, men often shop for women. This means that it is more difficult for women to request the procurement of personal items, like sanitary feminine products. The mobile shop rotates from house to house, managed by different community women in rural areas. This model was co-designed by IrishAid-funded local women’s groups to address their self-identified need. Where available, the mobile shop includes sanitary napkins and other feminine products, along with other goods. Where feminine hygiene products are not available in the bazaar to stock the mobile shop, Concern has found that there is unmet demand for these products, even in remote areas. From a livelihood and income-generation perspective, an interesting addition to the model is that the hosting woman is allowed to charge a small profit on sales, creating a new home-based income-generation method.

**Health Infrastructure**

The number of healthcare facilities has increased significantly since 2005, and their coverage in rural areas has greatly improved. Today, there are 1,844 government medical facilities at District Hospital level or below (the levels serving rural areas), nearly double the number of facilities existing in 2005. Every province has at least 20 or more health facilities at these levels, with the exception of Nimroz province (which has 17). The tiers of healthcare

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facilities that form the frame of the national healthcare system are set up and supported by MoPH’s BPHS program. In the design of BPHS, the structure includes the following levels of facilities:

**Health Post (HP)** – HPs are intended to be staffed with CHWs who offer outreach care for common maladies, and dispense contraception and micronutrient supplementation. Female CHWs help with pregnancies, deliveries and referrals for complicated issues. The aim is to have a catchment population of 1,000-1,500 people.

**Health Sub-Center (HSC)** – HSCs are intended to cover a population of about 3,000-7,000 people, providing health education, immunization, antenatal care, and family planning. In addition, HSCs are meant to treat common infectious diseases.

**Basic Health Center (BHC)** – BHCs are intended to offer the same level of care as HPs and HSCs, but with more complex outpatient care, including: antenatal, delivery and postpartum care, family planning, routine immunizations, and identification, referral and follow-up care for mental health patients and the disabled. Each Center is designed to treat 15,000-30,000 people.

**Comprehensive Health Center (CHC)** – In addition to the services outlined above, CHCs should be able to handle grave cases of childhood illnesses, treatment of complicated cases of malaria and mental health issues. They are also intended to have limited inpatient care facilities and a laboratory, serving a population of 30,000-60,000.

**District Hospital (DH)** – Operating at a district level, this tier is intended to manage all of the BPHS functions including major surgery, x-rays, and emergency obstetric care. They should have comprehensive inpatient and outpatient facilities. DHs should serve a population of 100,000-300,000 people.

In addition to the above list of facilities, there are secondary and tertiary medical facilities at provincial, regional, and national levels, dealing with more advanced cases. It should be noted that the above descriptions relate to the system design, rather than the achieved reality to date. Many of these facilities do not have the staff or services available that exist in the design. The table below demonstrates the prevalence of health facilities as the system has grown:

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69 For a comprehensive description of each level of service delivery along with the qualifications required by each member of staff, refer to MoPH’s A Basic Package of Health Services for Afghanistan 2010/1389, 5-7.
While the numbers of BHCs and HSCs continue to increase, the numbers of District Hospitals and CHCs have decreased slightly since last year. This is an indication that the health system is decentralizing, and that more local facilities are triaging cases and handling them at their respective levels without the need for onward referrals. According to a World Bank report from 2010, HSCs (introduced in 2008) appear to be making a positive impact, providing as much as half the new antenatal care services provided by BHCs, and at closer distances to target populations.

What is clear overall is that coverage of BPHS facilities has increased steadily since 2006. However, this coverage is not always evenly distributed. While it is noted above that all provinces have more than 20 BPHS facilities except for Nimroz, at present some provinces have more than 100 health facilities among the various types listed above, whilst others have just over 20. While population sizes differ among provinces, this still represents a disparity in access. For example, Badakhshan, Balkh, Herat, Kabul, and Nangarhar provinces have more than 100 BPHS health facilities, while Nooristan, Panjshir, Nimroz, Uruzgan, and Zabul have fewer than 30 and Badghis, Farah, Jawzjan, Khost, Paktika, Paktya, and Samangan have fewer than 40. Nearly 43% of people still live more than one hour’s walking time away from their nearest health facility, a reality disaggregated by province in the below graph. Cultural mobility constraints are an additional barrier for women, impeding their access significantly more than that of men.

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Table 4: Number of Health Facilities by Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility Type</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Sub-Center</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>154</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Health Center</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>789</td>
<td>804</td>
<td>808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Health Center</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Hospital</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Clinic (MOB)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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As mentioned, despite the above descriptions of services to be provided at various levels, there are often cases where the appropriate health human resources are simply not available to properly staff a given facility in a certain locale, limiting the services which can be offered. Due to this constraint, many of the above listed facilities do not offer all of the services intended in the system design.
In order to expand access to healthcare in difficult to reach places, starting in 2007, the Aga Khan Development Network has developed an ehealth program, linking basic rural facilities to more advanced ones in other parts of the country and region. Funded by AFD, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Roshan Telecommunications, ehealth involves digitally linking facilities to each other, such that consultations with doctors in other areas can be done remotely. This provides connections to specialists at sophisticated facilities to remote areas where access to only basic care is available. It is even possible to send digital x-rays to enhance remote diagnostics. In addition, capacity-building for local staff is possible through this system, with trainings provided remotely to staff on how to upgrade their skills and knowledge.

To date, AKDN has linked six facilities in Badakhshan province (including three BHCs in the remote border regions, one CHC and one District Hospital in central Badakhshan, and the Provincial Hospital in Faizabad), Bamyan Provincial Hospital, the French Medical Institute for Children in Kabul, the Khorog Diagnostic Centre in Tajikistan, several small facilities in northern Pakistan, and the Aga Khan University Hospital in Karachi. Among these facilities, 6,000 teleconsultations and telediagnostics have been performed, and 2,000 staff members have been trained and have upgraded their skills through this system.

In addition to the prevalence of health facilities, there is a further issue related to how “women-friendly” the facilities are considered to be. Some facilities are not constructed with adequate care taken for female privacy, especially as related to labor and delivery. Areas for labor and delivery should be carefully separated from areas of the health facility that may have male patients or visitors. Some communities have even voiced the need for additional waiting rooms or accommodation facilities to be constructed and attached to clinics and hospitals, in order to allow women to have a safe and private place to stay as they wait for labor. This could aid in increasing the number of attended births. For a related discussion on “women-friendly” infrastructure needs in Education, see p. 69-74

Despite disparities, the uptake of services is significantly higher among girls and women (above age 5) than it is among males of the same ages (while the number of under-five patients treated is broadly similar for both sexes). Nationwide, in the Persian calendar year 1391 (21 March 2012 – 20 March 2013) BPHS facilities treated 11,218,951 females over age 5, and 5,820,877 males of the same age.72

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Health Human Resources

Encouragingly, the number of midwives employed by MoPH has steadily increased over the last three years, from 2,181 in 2009/10 to 3,227 in 2013.  
However, in the table below one can see the highly uneven distribution of midwives across provinces, with some provinces still dramatically underserved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Total Number of Midwives</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Total Number of Midwives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Badakhshan</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>Kunar</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badghis</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Kunduz</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baghlan</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>Laghman</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balkh</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>Logar</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamyan</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>Nangarhar</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daikundi</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Nimroz</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farah</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Nuristan</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faryab</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Paktika</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghazni</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>Paktiya</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghor</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Panjshir</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helmand</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Parwan</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herat</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>Samangan</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jawzjan</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>Saripul</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabul</td>
<td>809</td>
<td>Takhar</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandahar</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Urozgan</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapisa</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Wardak</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khost</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Zabul</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is clear is that many women, particularly those in rural areas, still give birth at home without the assistance of a skilled healthcare professional. Only 33% of births take place in a health facility and the difference between urban and rural women is stark; while two thirds (66%) of urban women give birth in health facilities, this figure drops to only 25% among rural women.  

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73 Ibid.  
74 Ibid.  
Although 77% of all government medical facilities now have a female SBA,\(^7^6\) MoPH estimates that another 3,022 midwives are needed in order to properly staff all BPHS facilities nationwide.\(^7^7\) Both the AMS in 2010 and the AMICS in 2011 show that factors such as level of education of parents and place of residence are directly related to the likelihood of having an SBA present. MoPH supports regional midwifery training programs which incentivize the placement of midwives in challenging locales by recruiting students from those areas and guaranteeing them work placements in the medical facilities in their home districts. This has helped to ensure not only that the overall level of midwives is increasing, but also that a more even distribution can be achieved. A similar system has also been launched for Community-based Nurses. However, more must be done to prevent attrition from these placements. Despite these gains, large gaps in the human resource needs for the national health system persist. In order to deliver basic healthcare, WHO estimates that at least 23 doctors, nurses and midwives are needed for every 10,000 people.\(^7^8\) The Afghan public health sector has 4.8. Dividing the population by the number of government doctors in each region shows how many people are served by a single doctor.


\(^{7^7}\) National Priority Program: Health for All Afghans. (Kabul, Ministry of Public Health, 2012).

Unfortunately, the ratio of doctors per ten thousand people has remained the same since 2006, as population growth has outpaced the employment of qualified physicians. There continues to be a particularly acute shortage of obstetricians and gynecologists (see Graph 7 below). It is notable that 10 provinces are completely without any MDs trained in either of these two areas of women’s health.

(Source: CSO Statistical Yearbook 2011/12)

(Graph 7: Number of Obstetricians and Gynecologists by Province)

(Source: CSO Statistical Yearbook 2012)

In addition to the availability of trained healthcare professionals, there continues to be a cultural reluctance to allow women to be treated by male health workers. Given this ongoing challenge, it is of particular concern that currently, nearly 25% of healthcare facilities still do not have female health workers. This is related to both a shortage of female health workers generally, and also to a difficulty finding female health workers willing to work in remote or insecure areas.

**Nutrition**

South Asia (including Afghanistan) is characterized by high levels of malnutrition, with most countries in the region demonstrating stunting and wasting proportions between 20 – 60% of the population. South Asia accounts for approximately 90% of global child malnutrition, and has undernutrition rates roughly double the global average. In Afghanistan, the stunting and wasting prevalence is 55% and 17.8% respectively, and 31.2% of the population is deemed underweight. These figures include both moderate and severe cases. This phenomenon has a significant gender dynamic. Women and girls are more likely than men and boys to be malnourished in South Asian households, partly due to being allocated lesser portions and poorer quality food, and having more limited access to medical care.

Many factors have been shown to correlate with the nutritional status of women and girls, including the education levels of household men, the education levels of household women, poverty levels, urban vs. rural locations, household size, and women’s decision-making power in the household. The malnutrition of women affects that of children in a variety of ways: a mother’s malnutrition during pregnancy is a key determinant of underweight babies and their poor nutritional status in infancy, while under-nourishment in mothers has been shown to affect their capacity to engage in critical childcare practices (including breastfeeding), contributing to poor nutritional status in early childhood. Poor nutritional status in infancy and early childhood not only

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85. Ibid, v.
affects survival rates, but also has long-term effects for surviving children, such as lower school attendance and attainment rates.

**Box 5: Nutrition**

Since 2008, Save the Children has been implementing a CIDA and AusAID-funded nutrition model that integrates both a clinical method called Comprehensive Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM), and a community-based public health approach, called Nutrition Education and Rehabilitation Sessions (NERS). CMAM includes therapeutic treatment in health facilities (both inpatient and outpatient treatment, as required) for children and pregnant or lactating mothers. CHWs are trained to identify and refer cases to clinical facilities. NERS is focused on sessions with mothers that teach what to cook, what is best to eat among local products, and how to recognize signs of malnutrition in their children. This model is implemented in 7 provinces, in partnership with the local BPHS implementers. Implementing both models in the same communities allows for prevention and also follow-up to severe cases, creating a partnership between the clinical facilities and community-based efforts. Save the children is also providing technical assistance to MoPH to integrate CMAM into the national system.

Another model of a community-based nutrition intervention is implemented by the Aga Khan Development Network in 16 districts of Badakhshan province, since 2012. This CIDA-funded model includes acute therapeutic feeding in local clinical facilities as well, along with training to farmers on crop diversity and techniques for growing healthy foods for household use, during all seasons. This is coupled with public health promotion activities and messaging.

Government health facilities do provide therapeutic feeding in the form of Ready to Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTF) and supplements for pregnant women, along with some public health outreach education on nutrition. However, RUTFs are sometimes in short supply as they are typically imported from neighbouring countries and then must be distributed to health facilities nation-wide. A comprehensive nutrition approach at the community level, linked to micro-nutrient analysis and food security/crop diversity measures has not been integrated into the national health system as yet.

**Other Health Issues Affecting Women**

**HIV/AIDS**

Accurate data about the prevalence of HIV in Afghanistan is hard to find, and estimates vary as to how many people suffer from the illness. Men are statistically more likely to carry HIV than women, although some developing
countries have seen a shift over time to women becoming the fastest growing group of HIV positive members of the population. As of 2011, 638 cases of HIV were reported in Afghanistan, an increase since 2006 when only 48 cases were reported. It is not clear whether this represents a growing problem in Afghanistan, or rather an increase in screening.

Those who are most at risk of contracting HIV are Injection Drug Users (IDUs), men who have sex with men (MSM), prisoners, and female sex workers. Some of these issues overlap. In 2007, 76.2% of IDUs reported paying women for sex. A World Bank paper shows that only 17-32% of IDUs who paid for sex in the previous six months used a condom. These are risky behaviors that may spread HIV in future to new demographics.

Abortion

Abortion remains largely illegal in Afghanistan, and is punishable with long, medium, or short prison sentences, depending on the circumstances. Notably, if the abortion is performed by a trained medical professional, they are to receive a maximum sentence, unless they are doing so to save the life of the mother (in which case, they incur no penalty). The pregnant woman is also penalized for abortion, if she submits to one willingly. She is punishable with a short prison sentence and a fine. There is no mention in the penal code of abortion in the case of a pregnancy caused by rape.

Mental Health

Despite being an integrated part of the national health system design, where various BPHS tiers are intended to offer systematic mental health services, there are still very few trained medical workers who are able to treat psychological or mental illnesses, and there is no dedicated university faculty to train mental health workers in Afghanistan. Given the decades of conflict experienced by Afghans, there is a concern that mental health problem rates may be quite high; however, there is no information to provide an accurate

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picture of the prevalence of mental health illnesses in Afghanistan. According to the CSO, there are only 50 specialists in psychiatry in the country – 44 of them are in Kabul and the rest are in Nangarhar, Baghlan, Samangan, Balkh, and Faryab. There are none in any of the other provinces.

For women, harmful traditional practices that particularly impact them are widespread and overlap with mental health issues. While there are no definitive national figures to show the extent of these practices, frequent reports and media coverage demonstrate cases of forced marriages, child marriages, and domestic violence (these issues are further discussed in Chapter 5). These types of practices are sometimes linked to suicide among women, including cases of self-immolation. By some indications, female self-immolation appears to be on the rise; however, without comprehensive data defining the existing prevalence, this is a difficult phenomenon to track. An increase in reported cases may only indicate increasing willingness to report and an increasing social acknowledgment of the issue, rather than a greater number of cases. While these cases are outwardly noticeable, it is likely that women also suffer from a high prevalence of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorders.

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Box 6: Mental Health Service Delivery

Today, a small group of NGOs provide mental health services to Afghan women, but much of this work is confined to urban areas:

- Medica Afghanistan provides professional psychological counseling services to women and girls affected by war and violence in Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif, among other services. Since 2002, Medica has provided psychosocial counseling for 2,630 women, and currently has a case load of 359 women. Medica has also provided Basic Counseling Training for 440 health workers, social workers, and health professionals, and 143 women activists.
- The International Medical Corps (IMC) has been working with the Ministries of Higher Education and Public Health to improve advanced psychiatric education at medical universities in Afghanistan.
- The International Psychosocial Organization (IPSO) is currently working with MoPH to address mental health more fully in the national health system, and train doctors and nurses in mental health in provinces across the country. To date, IPSO has trained nearly 150 health professionals. With MoPH, they aim to now train 70 Afghan mental health trainers, who can then disperse to various provinces and train other health care providers.

Policy Implications

Despite the improvements noted in the foregoing chapter, there are clearly still a number of challenges for women in the health sector. Looking ahead, the recommendations for the future are:

1. **Access to Healthcare** – Extend coverage of the BPHS system, reaching remaining uncovered areas still without access to basic healthcare facilities.
2. **Invest in Health Human Resources** – Invest in female health professionals, including mental health professionals. Many of the existing BPHS facilities are not fully staffed according to the BPHS design. Approaches that allow for equitable regional distribution of human resources nationwide are ideal.
3. **Skilled Birth Attendants** – Continue training midwives and other SBAs, expanding midwifery school coverage to all provinces, and incentivizing the work of graduates in rural and underserved areas.
4. **Contraceptive Use** – Continue and expand information outreach by CHWs and other actors regarding contraceptive options and benefits. Many men and women are still unaware of the family planning methods available to them, and the number of men and women who use contraceptives is still low across the country.

5. **Nutrition** – Integrate comprehensive nutrition programming into the national healthcare system, particularly in a way that seeks to address the specific gender dynamics at work. Malnutrition prevention work is most needed, as an integrated part of the national health system.

6. **Legislation** – Remove abortion from the Afghan penal code, and further define medical and other justifications for accessing safe abortion (i.e. after rape).
Chapter 3: Education
The 2005 Country Gender Assessment reflected a critical moment in Afghanistan’s history, just four years after the fall of the Taliban. At the time, the available data was already showing significant increases in the number of girls and women in education as compared to the period under the Taliban administration. This rapid increase was a clear indication that demand for girls’ education was strong. Despite shortcomings in the education sector, there was a sense of optimism that the ensuing years would witness a continuation of such changes.

Many of the key indicators that influence girls’ education attainment show that Afghanistan continues to move in the right direction. Female literacy is currently at 12%, a 7% increase over 2002, where early estimates were that female literacy was at 5%. More promising is that for the age bracket 12 – 16, female literacy is at 36% (although the same age bracket for boys is at 62%). Despite the remaining spread between boys and girls, the gap seen in this age group is the smallest gender gap in literacy ever seen in Afghanistan. This

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97 Ibid, 4.
compares to 98% of female youth in Iran,99 nearly 100% in Tajikistan,100 and 61% in Pakistan.101

The total number of girls and women in education has notably increased, 2005. This relates to the low participation of both boys and girls in education at that time, which necessitated significant gains in boys’ education as well. Gains in girls’ education in real numbers have been achieved at all levels of the education system, while some levels also demonstrate proportionate gains, indicating a closing of the gender gap. Essential to the increased number of girls and women in education has been a dramatic increase in education facilities within the government system countrywide, along with an increased number of female teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6: Key Education Indicators for Women and Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion and Number of Female Primary School Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion and Number of Female Secondary School Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion and Number of Female Higher Secondary School Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion and Number of Female University Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion and Number of Female Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Government Schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the increases in real numbers are encouraging, the gap persists between girls’ and boys’ education, and is particularly wide at higher levels, indicating early drop-out rates for girls. This clearly demonstrates the need for continued efforts not just to increase the supply of educational opportunities, but to tailor

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105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
109 Ibid, 57.
110 Ibid, 50.
those opportunities to girls and women and to target key obstacles to their educational attainment.

One key achievement since 2005 is the increase in data that is now available in the education sector in Afghanistan. The sector is among the most data rich in the country, making it possible to see the situation of girls' education from various angles and understand barriers to education at a more detailed level. This chapter will explore some of this data, relying on the MoE database, and some other key sources of data and studies exploring dynamics of education in Afghanistan.

**Enrolment and Retention**

Since 2005, female enrolment has increased substantially year on year. For example, there was a 10.2% increase in the number of enrolled female students in 2011-12 compared to 2010-11.\(^\text{110}\) Despite this, the table below shows the distribution of students by type of educational institution, with girls and women remaining in the minority in each case. One notable exception is in community-based education classes, where girls make up over half of students enrolled.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Education</th>
<th>Enrolled Male Students</th>
<th>Enrolled Female Students</th>
<th>Percentage Male Students</th>
<th>Percentage Female Students</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Education</td>
<td>4,580,701</td>
<td>2,901,801</td>
<td>61.22</td>
<td>38.78</td>
<td>7,482,502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-based Education</td>
<td>94,733</td>
<td>124,437</td>
<td>43.22</td>
<td>56.78</td>
<td>219,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Education</td>
<td>169,940</td>
<td>32,014</td>
<td>84.15</td>
<td>15.85</td>
<td>201,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Training College</td>
<td>40,652</td>
<td>19,523</td>
<td>67.56</td>
<td>32.44</td>
<td>60,175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical and Vocational Education</td>
<td>33,190</td>
<td>4,139</td>
<td>88.91</td>
<td>11.09</td>
<td>37,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Literacy School Students</td>
<td>11,162</td>
<td>9,054</td>
<td>55.21</td>
<td>44.79</td>
<td>20,216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,930,378</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,090,968</strong></td>
<td><strong>61.96</strong></td>
<td><strong>38.04</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,021,346</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: EMIS data for 1390)

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With all education types combined (up to higher secondary options), girls and women make up an average of just over 38% of enrolled students. The table above demonstrates enrolment across types of educational institutions. While in most types of education there is a considerable gap between the percentage of male and percentage of female students, there are two notable exceptions. Firstly, Community-based Education is the only type of education that actually has a higher enrolment rate for girls than boys. This is further discussed under the sub-heading “Community-based Education”, below. Secondly, the gap between men and women in Adult Literacy Schools is considerably narrower than for other forms of education, indicating high demand for literacy education among women. The tables below take a closer look at government general education schools (i.e. the national public education system), which account for the vast majority of students in Afghanistan. The following table disaggregates female enrolment by region (as compared to male enrolment), demonstrating that some regions are approaching parity, while others have less than a quarter the number of girls as boys.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Highlands</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Afghanistan</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Afghanistan</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeastern Afghanistan</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Afghanistan</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Afghanistan</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeastern Afghanistan</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwestern Afghanistan</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By province, the following disaggregation of female and male students is instructive. Badakhshan is the closest province to achieving parity in Afghanistan, while provinces like Uruzgan, Zabul, and Paktika demonstrate a gender gap in education far worse than the national average. In Uruzgan, barely above 10% of all students enrolled are girls.\(^{112}\)

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\(^{112}\) Ibid.
The above table shows a combined proportion including all grades from primary to upper secondary. When analysed by grade or level of education, the figures reveal a diverse picture. While in Panjshir girls actually have a higher enrolment rate in primary school than boys (51%), the province then moves to 14th place nationwide by secondary school, where girls make up only 33%. Uruzgan has the lowest recorded percentage of girls in primary school in the country (12%), with a steady decline in the upper grades. Although Paktika has 22% girls at primary school, by upper secondary, there is not a single recorded girl in education in the province. By contrast, Nimroz manages to maintain rates of 44% girls in secondary and 36% in upper secondary, whilst being a remote and sometimes volatile province.

Despite a diverse set of trends that speak to a complex field of factors influencing girls’ education, what is clear is that in all provinces, there are a significantly higher number and proportion of girls in primary school than in secondary and post-secondary. The MoE’s national figures show that 41.5% of
Grade 1 students are female, but by Grade 12, the figure drops to 30.6%. Another way to look at this is through the “survival rate” in primary school, or the rate of students who progress from being enrolled in first grade, to completing sixth grade. In 2009, the World Bank estimated the survival rate for boys was between 53% – 55%, and 35% for girls. This is an issue of retention, and by these figures, it is clear that retention is poor for both boys and girls. This points to general problems in the education system, while girls face additional gender-specific challenges. In Afghanistan, retention of girls in school is affected by a series of interconnected factors, including early marriage and early motherhood, cultural perceptions of appropriate activities for pubescent girls, mobility constraints coupled with a lack of secondary facilities in close proximity to home, a lack of female teachers, a perception of education having low value and low return on investment (particularly for girls), a lack of job opportunities for women, and poverty. In addition, the education of parents is often correlated to that of children, especially daughters. While a father’s education does not appear to consistently correlate to girls’ education (with other factors influencing girls’ education much more strongly), a mother’s educational attainment and literacy appears to correlate strongly to girls’ education, especially to test score outcomes. Other sources note that the possible refugee experiences and degree of exposure to secular education of both parents can influence their attitudes toward the education of all children.

Retention of girls in schools suffers most acutely at the following key stages: Grades 1 and 2, Grade 5, and Grade 9. Girls drop out in Grades 1 and 2 largely because their families may have enrolled them without ever having a strong intention for their daughters to attend regularly. Due to starting at an older age than internationally typical (between ages 6 – 9), students are often 12 years old or more by Grade 5, a critical age for girls for puberty and early marriage.

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116 Although state education is ostensibly free, there are many associated costs (such as transport) that are prohibitive to some. For many families, daughters often play an important role in household operations and income generation, and they cannot afford this loss of income along with additional costs for schooling.
or for household duties to increase. Those who make it to Grade 9 (through lower secondary), often drop out due to further travel distances, a lack of female teachers to teach segregated classes, marriage, and motherhood. Some agencies working on education issues have implemented special measures to support retention, including consolidation classes and tutoring, along with family outreach and discussions with School Shuras, in order to help girls remain in school through the difficult transitional years when drop-out rates are highest.

Infrastructure

There are currently 13,562 state-run general education schools across the country, a large increase since 2002, when data showed that there were only 3,800 schools.

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In Afghanistan, three models of schools exist, at various levels. There are all-boys’ schools, all-girls’ schools, and “mixed” schools. Mixed schools can either have mixed classes (usually in primary only), or multiple shifts during a given school day, with boys’ and girls’ classes taking place at separate times. Currently, 68% of general education schools run one shift (mixed, all boys, or all girls), 28% of schools run two shifts, and 3% of schools run 3 shifts.\textsuperscript{121}

The following graphs assess the number of mixed, all-girl and all-boy schools by province, at various levels of the education system. As can be seen in these graphs, the majority of schools can be considered mixed, although this is not the case for every province. It is important to keep in mind, however, that sometimes names of schools can be misleading; even in cases where schools are named “girls' school” or “boys' school”, they have often in practice taken on varying usage practices that do not necessarily coincide with their name, making categorization challenging.

Looking at the availability of schools in each region reveals an interesting picture. In primary education, it is clear that girls in several provinces are overwhelmingly worse off than in any other locations. For example, Helmand, Zabul, and Uruzgan have very high proportions of all-boys’ schools, with very low proportions of both mixed and all-girls’ schools. This severely limits the educational opportunities for girls. By contrast, places like Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Baghlan, Takhar, and Bamyan have a strong majority of mixed schools, where boys and girls study in mixed classes or in separate classes or separate shifts. This is often the best option for increasing access for girls, since it does not require funding for separate facilities and supplies (which might be difficult to secure). However, it is also clear from the above graphs that mixed schools are more prevalent at the primary level, and notably decline in frequency as the grades increase, making the availability of all-girls’ schools a more salient factor in the higher grades.

The graphing of secondary schools shows some provinces which still have few all-female schools but high proportions of mixed schools. This is usually an indication of relatively less conservative areas where utilizing shared facilities (even if in different shifts) is still acceptable in secondary school. This can be seen in such diverse locations as Herat, Takhar, Daikundi, Bamyan, Badakhshan, Balkh, Kabul, and Nimroz. On the other hand, in Helmand, 83% of secondary schools are for boys only, while only 17% are mixed and none are only for girls. When only looking at upper secondary, where the proportion of mixed schools is significantly lower, it is important to take a look at the proportion of all girls’ schools. In Paktika, Helmand, and Zabul, the proportion of girls’ schools remains below 10% at this level, while mixed schools are low as well. When secondary schools are fewer, girls have to travel much longer distances to reach them, creating a situation where mobility constraints augment as well. One study has shown that every mile a school is away from home, girls’ enrollment decreases by 19%.

In addition to the availability of educational institutions, the quality of education, and the perception of its quality on behalf of parents, is affected by sub-standard facilities, including inadequate buildings (or the lack of one),

122 Primary school educates children from grades 1-6, Lower Secondary school or Middle school educates children from grades 7-9, and Higher Secondary school educates children from grades 10-12.

unsafe drinking water, insufficient books and supplies, and a lack of sanitation facilities. Unfortunately, many existing schools are still lacking these basic items. A 2011 Oxfam study demonstrates that only 28.7% of students say they have access to stationary, and only 65% say their school has sufficient books.\textsuperscript{124} According to UNICEF, in 2009 three quarters of state schools did not have access to safe sanitation facilities, including drinking water,\textsuperscript{125} and the MoE data points out that almost half (48.2%) of all schools have no buildings,\textsuperscript{126} while 64% of state schools do not have a surrounding wall.\textsuperscript{127} Some of these infrastructural gaps can be seen in the graph below:\textsuperscript{128}

![Graph 12: Percentage of Schools without Buildings or Surrounding Walls](image)

- Percentage of schools with available information without buildings
- Percentage of schools with available information without a surrounding wall

\textsuperscript{124}Ibid, 19.
\textsuperscript{127}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128}Ibid.
These deficiencies disproportionately impact girls. Where such requirements are missing, parents may be less supportive of education in general, but are more likely to keep their daughters at home than their sons. This is largely because some of these gaps present challenges to cultural values of modesty for girls (i.e. absent boundary walls and lack of separate latrines). The issue of having segregated latrines for boys and girls can particularly affect girls after puberty, and they often miss days out of each month due to menstruation. Without separate latrines and a method of discretely cleaning sanitary cloths during menstruation, girls who are still able to attend school after puberty often begin attending inconsistently and falling behind. This may then increase the drop-out rate further. Moreover, the NRVA 2007/08 noted that distance from school is the single most significant barrier nationwide to children attending school (as per household responses). This reality is a far greater constraint to girls than to boys due to their reduced mobility, and contributes strongly to girls’ drop-out rates, particularly in lower secondary and above.

**Content and Quality**

Education in Afghanistan suffers from qualitative challenges in the content of the curriculum, and the pedagogical capacity among teachers, many of whom are not certified. Due to a lack of teachers, early grades suffer from overcrowding, and subsequently have high drop-out rates. Like infrastructural deficiencies, qualitative weaknesses engender disinterest and a default to more traditional training, especially for girls. If parents suspect that the quality of education their children receive does not meet their expectations, they may prefer to maximize skills learned at home through domestic work at a young age, which prepares children for their adult lives. They may be more likely to

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make this choice for their daughters than their sons. Furthermore, higher levels of education do not always result in higher levels of income, particularly for women. If a tangible livelihood result from educating girls cannot be observed, families will be less likely to keep their girls in education into the higher grades. An additional challenge to linking girl’s education to household benefit is that a girl’s future includes changing households upon getting married; a girl’s family may not be willing to heavily invest in her income-generation potential, due to the fact that she will join another family, taking her income-generation capacity out of the household she was raised in.

One content issue relates to the way girls and boys, women and men, are discussed and presented in the education curriculum. Gender stereotypes are portrayed regularly in Afghanistan’s textbooks, with more pictures of boys and men, doing more active things. Women and girls are almost exclusively portrayed doing traditional chores such as making food at home. Lessons and stories most often have male leading characters, and exclusive language is often used with only male references, pronouns (in Pashto), and names. Occupations and household divisions of labor are consistently represented in traditional ways, where women rarely are shown participating in life outside of the home. Pashto language texts have a particular challenge due to a unique linguistic structure of the language; in Pashto the language structure alters depending on whether there is a male or female speaker, making the whole language thoroughly gender-specific. Studies that have interviewed teachers show that many of them have similar beliefs and worldviews, in terms of the clear division of roles between women and men. Unfortunately, these portrayals reinforce stereotypes, limit the role models and perceived opportunities for girls, and reaffirm for boys that girls and women should be confined to the household. According to a World Bank study, curricula and textbooks which only present favorable adult role models for boys hinder girls’ participation and ability to learn.

The influence of anti-Government forces continues to play a role in shaping Afghanistan’s domestic policies. As one report highlights, the Taliban have used the school curriculum as leverage in peace negotiations.

important area to monitor as state and international actors consider ways in which to include opposition forces in national governance, as education in general, and the content of the curriculum especially, is likely to be a contested space in any future power-sharing arrangement at national level. This could potentially affect how women and girls are portrayed in the curriculum, what they are taught, and could also limit their access to education in general.

The creation of private schools and private universities may provide part of the solution to the low quality of education in some areas. However, as may be expected, most of these institutions are located in urban areas rather than remote rural areas. There are now 492 general education private schools in Afghanistan. Yet women are still underrepresented in these schools (perhaps even more so in private schools than in public schools). Women constitute only 14.8% of students in private university, while in Government universities, this figure is 19.1% (see below under the sub-heading “Tertiary Education” for more on women in universities). The cost of sending sons or daughters to private schools/universities is also likely to be prohibitive for most families, given levels of poverty across the country. What is more, sending children to private school is no guarantee of quality education. Following a probe into private education in Afghanistan in 2011, MoE closed down 10 schools, while others were fined or received written warnings.

Female Teachers

The proportion of female teachers has increased since 2005 (when 28% of teachers were women), to a current proportion of 31% of all teachers. The increase in real numbers more clearly demonstrates the progress made, with the number of female teachers more than doubling since 2005. However, with the significant increase in demand for girls’ education, the supply of female teachers has not kept pace. According to MoE, 245 out of 412 urban and rural districts still do not have a single qualified female teacher, and 90% of female teachers are in urban areas.

135 Ibid, 55.
In fact, the lack of female teachers has become a significant barrier to further increases in girls’ education. In primary schools, mixed classes are far more common and the need for female teachers is often less important, as the demand for completely segregated schools is considerably lower than at higher levels of education. However, for many families, male teachers teaching girls’ classes, especially in secondary grades, is a major barrier to girls’ school attendance. The scarcity of female teachers is particularly acute in secondary and tertiary education. When girls cease to be allowed to learn from male teachers, there are often no female teachers to take them on in higher grades, which contributes to drop-out rates. Furthermore, girls have been shown to score higher in test scores when they have female teachers, possibly due to a greater willingness to participate in the classroom or due to more attention received from their teacher.137 Thus the supply of qualified female teachers is imperative for improving educational retention and advancement among women.

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The above graph shows the increase in the number of female students and female teachers in government general education schools, expressed as percentages to facilitate comparison. The number of female teachers has increased in almost all provinces since 2007 (Uruzgan and Paktika are clear exceptions), while the number of female students has also increased in all provinces. While the graph may demonstrate a correlation, it cannot fully represent causality. The divergent levels of growth clearly demonstrate that strong factors other than female teacher numbers do also impact the number of female students.

At a provincial level, the number of female teachers varies greatly. In Paktika for instance, only 12 of the 3,220 teachers are female. In Kabul City on the other hand, there are actually many more female teachers (16,710) than male teachers (5,768). In fact, the shortage of female teachers nationwide is exacerbated by the crowding of female teachers in Kabul. At university level, there are also very few female teachers. In 2012, only 15.2% of lecturers were female. This issue is discussed further below, under the sub-heading “Tertiary Education”.

Source: CSO Statistical Yearbooks 2009-10; 2011-12
One of the exacerbating factors for increasing female teachers is that women are still underrepresented in teacher training facilities. In 2011/12, there were 19,523 women in teacher training, which constitutes 32.4% of the total number of trainees in government Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs). Encouragingly, 39.9% of new students for teacher training were female in 2011-2012. The Government is expanding its teacher training facilities by adding district level “satellite” colleges (affiliated with Teacher Training Colleges in provincial centers), an approach that could have a positive impact on the ability of female secondary graduates to attend TTCs, due to proximity of the district facilities to their homes. District TTCs are allowing students to teach whilst attending TTCs as well, an approach that acknowledges the widespread practice of secondary graduates taking on local teaching responsibilities without being officially certified as teachers. This approach makes it possible for young women to earn money by teaching, while simultaneously attending higher education close to home and becoming certified professionals. While benefiting these women, this approach can also increase the availability of female teachers, with a downstream impact on numbers of female students. Further incentives are also needed to encourage women TTC graduates to then work in more remote or underserved areas where need is greatest.

Box 7: Increasing Female Teachers

In order to increase the number of available female teachers, some NGOs have developed strategies for mentoring female secondary school students into teacher training. Save the Children has developed a model called the Girls’ Urgent Early Steps to Teaching Success program (GUESTS), with support from the Open Society Institute and AusAID. In this model, they deliver teacher training to girls who have progressed to Grades 11 and 12, in parallel to their regular curriculum education. Save the Children works with families to agree to have their daughters attend their regular school shift, and then attend a teacher training session, which takes place at their secondary school. This model is implemented in Uruzgan, Nangarhar, and Bamyan provinces. To date, 235 female students have been graduated from the GUESTS program, with 191 more in training. A significant majority of graduated students have become teachers and/or have gone on to tertiary education, demonstrating that this kind of “apprenticeship” program can be successful in developing more female teachers and in supporting girls into tertiary education.

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Security

Afghanistan has a history of attacks on schools, most recently by Taliban elements, but in the past by other factions. This phenomenon has been viewed as a means by which to strike out at the state and counter its influence. Ideological attacks on state schools (especially girls’ schools) and subsequent closures were reasonably common occurrences from 2005-2008. According to a report by the Civil Military Fusion Centre, 49% of girls’ schools in Paktika, 69% in Zabul and 59% in Helmand were burned or attacked between 2006-2009. Despite a decline in frequency of what appear to be ideological attacks, a number of schools have been targeted recently, resulting in school closures once again. For example, in May 2012, anti-government groups set fire to a girls’ secondary school in Wazir village in Khogyani district of Nangarhar province, destroying two school buildings and equipment.

More recently, widespread public opposition to the targeting of schools has, to some extent, limited these attacks. However, attacks of other kinds appear to be common, including criminal attacks, asset theft, and targeting schools due to their alternative uses. For example, schools have been widely used as polling stations across Afghanistan during elections, and are often targeted during election seasons in an attempt to disrupt voting. During the 2009/10 election cycles, there were between 200-250 cases of violence, threats, or pre-emptive closures of schools directly related to the elections, with approximately 90 direct attacks on schools used as polling stations. In August 2009 alone (leading up to the presidential election), there were more than 500 indirect threats on schools related to the elections. In addition, local Afghan National Army (ANA) or Afghan National Police (ANP) officers have at times been instructed to guard schools, or have even in some cases occupied schools or co-located with schools; this is a controversial practice as even their temporary presence may in fact attract politically-motivated attacks. Since 2009, more

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145 Care International and UNICEF. Forthcoming study on attacks on schools (forthcoming, in Summer 2013).
146 Indirect threats include cases of threats through radio broadcasts and other media announcements targeting schools within range.
147 Care International and UNICEF. Forthcoming study on attacks on schools (forthcoming, in Summer 2013).
than 60 cases of military operations and searches have been reported at schools.\textsuperscript{148} Schools have also been collateral damage (in more than 50 cases since 2009), due to proximity to a high profile target or an ongoing operation. This is often due to an ANA/ANP checkpoint being established close to a school, or schools being constructed close to a district governor’s office, etc. It is critical that schools remain non-politicized spaces, disassociated from state functions and likely targets like state security forces, and that site selection is carefully considered.

In addition, there has been an escalating trend over the past 1 – 2 years of alleged poisoning incidents, typically at girls’ schools (approximately 30 cases reported nationwide).\textsuperscript{149} To date, evidence is not concrete about the nature of these incidents, who is involved, whether these are indeed chemical attacks, etc. Conclusive evidence of the use of chemicals has not been established based on soil or water tests, or medical examinations of the affected girls. This trend warrants further study to better understand the nature of these incidents. However, despite a lack of information around these cases, they have nonetheless increased the perceived security threat to female students.

Unfortunately, whether anti-education in nature or not, any attack on a school creates concerns around the safety of education. Attacks on schools deter parents from sending their children back to school and may force schools to close down. A World Bank-funded CARE report from 2008 found that many schools (85%) stayed closed for 1-3 months following attacks.\textsuperscript{150} The report also found that in 5 out of the 8 provinces studied, female attendance was more likely to be affected by threats/attacks than male attendance. For example, female attendance dropped by 39% in Herat, compared to 1% among males, after attacks. Interestingly, threats/attacks affected male attendance to a greater extent than female attendance in Ghazni (68% of boys compared to 22% of girls) and Khost (58% of boys compared to 46% of girls).\textsuperscript{151} This warrants further study, to better understand the gendered dynamics at work in family decision-making regarding returning to school after attacks.

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid, 41.
Community Involvement

Community engagement and support to education, especially for girls, can be a critical factor in girls’ retention rates and attainment levels. Various education actors, including MoE, through the World Bank-funded Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP), and key NGOs supporting the education sector in Afghanistan, have utilized models of community engagement to support girls’ education, in recognition of the strong role that family support and community attitudes have on their ability to attend school. These models have included the establishment, training, and support of School Shuras, School Management Committees, Parent-Teacher Associations, or Mothers’ Fora.

While various models exist, these committees often take on responsibilities related to monitoring their local schools, observing quality, teacher attendance, use of resources, child safety, and collectively making decisions related to their local school and the education of their children. Depending on the model, the committees are made up of parents, village elders, religious leaders, students, and school administrators. In many areas, women are able to participate as members of these committees. To date, the Social Mobilization Unit of EQUIP has established 12,712 School Management Shuras. Key NGOs implementing education programming have established more than 6,300 of such committees/councils.152

Community-based Education

Due to the immense challenges of geography and culture, and the limitations of government resource and capacity at this time, in 2012 the MoE reaffirmed its commitment to Community-based Education (CBE), developing a policy and recognizing existing classes as part of the broader national education system. As can be seen in Table 7 above, CBE is the only form of education where national enrolment of girls outstrips that of boys, largely because boys are more likely to be permitted to attend government schools, where girls may not be for a variety of reasons. Due to the closeness of classes and the ability for communities to be heavily involved in their local CBE class, they may be more comfortable sending their girls to this kind of education, allowing CBE classes to reach out-of-school girls. CBE classes are located in local communities,

152 This figure includes data from CARE, the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, Save the Children, BRAC, the Aga Khan Foundation, the International Rescue Committee, and Catholic Relief Services.
usually in a room in a family’s home, and a teacher is nominated by the community as a trusted person for teaching children. This is done in communities where the nearest government schools are still too far from a village, and is seen as an important tool for increasing levels of education in remote and rural areas, especially where governmental presence is light.\textsuperscript{153}

CBE has been shown to disproportionately benefit girls, as they are more likely to miss out on school due to mobility constraints that come into effect when travel is required to get to school. A government school may be several hours’ walk away, and only provides approximately 3 hours of instruction per shift in a day. This means that a child might be required to walk 4 hours or more for 3 hours of instruction. Many families do not view being away from home for 7 or 8 hours a day acceptable for girls. CBE classes are typically only a few minutes from their homes, at the home of a trusted member of the community.

Some of the main criteria for establishing a Community-based School are:

i) The host community must allow girls to attend the school;

ii) The host community must be at least 3kms from the nearest government school;

iii) It must provide appropriate shelter for the classes, and;

By the end of 2014, MoE has committed to supporting 4,800 community-based classes directly, in areas where the conditions for establishing a formal government school cannot yet be met (with the aim of eventually establishing formal schools and transitioning the CBE classes).\textsuperscript{155} This is in addition to CBE implementation by a set of key development partners.

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid, 12.  
\textsuperscript{155} National Educational Strategic Plan 2010-2014. (Kabul: Ministry of Education, 2010).}
Box 8: Community-based Education

A broad set of NGOs have chosen to implement CBE as a means of increasing access to education in underserved areas, and reaching out-of-school girls. CBE implementers facilitate establishing a class in a community and forming a School Shura (or School Management Committee), which nominates a teacher who is acceptable to the broader community.

CBE has been shown to overcome some of the major barriers to girls attending school, namely the barriers of distance, mobility, safety, and time involved when government schools are too far from home. In addition, because CBE teachers are selected by the community, implementers find that there is broader trust in the person selected, and communities typically express high levels of satisfaction and ownership toward their local CBE class. In this model, girls can often attend school more consistently and for longer.

A range of NGOs implement CBE in Afghanistan, often in partnership with each other. CBE implementers include UNICEF, CARE International, Save the Children, Catholic Relief Services, the Aga Khan Foundation, the International Rescue Committee, the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, and BRAC. These implementers have been supported by AusAID, USAID, CIDA, DFID, DANIDA, NZAID, SIDA, KOICA, Stichting Vluchtelin (SV), the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM), the Netherland’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Jochnick Foundation, and Caritas Australia. Among these organizations, CBE has been implemented in 28 provinces, in support of nearly 13,000 classes. CBE implementers have typically provided teacher training (both in academic subjects and in pedagogy) to the community-selected teachers. Different implementers have incorporated various additional components into the model, including clustering CBE classes, linking CBE classes to government “hub schools”, facilitating teacher-to-teacher peer learning circles, establishing adolescent reading centers to support students in continued learning after they graduate from CBE classes, and running mobile CBE classes for nomadic communities.

CBE classes cover different grades depending on the location. Some classes have focused on Grades 1 – 3, while others cover all of primary school. One challenge in the CBE model is to begin addressing the widening gap between boys and girls in secondary education, preparing more girls for tertiary education. CARE International has introduced lower secondary into their CBE classes, an approach that is now being assessed and considered for expansion by other partners.
Tertiary Education

The number of women in universities has increased significantly since 2005. However, similar to the proportion of women at other levels of education, the proportion of women in university has remained the same. For the year 2011-2012, the CSO reports that 14,811 (19%) of the 77,654 students in Afghanistan’s 26 government universities and institutes of higher learning are women. For the same year, of the 34,713 students in the country’s 43 private universities, there were 5,123 (14.8%) women. With government and private university figures combined, only 17.7% of all university students are women. While the actual number of women in tertiary education has nearly doubled, the proportion has not changed since 2003 when the World Bank reported that 19% of students in university were female. This demonstrates that the increase in male students in universities has outpaced the increase in female students; hence, while actual numbers of women in universities have increased, the absolute gap between the number of men and the number of women enrolled in universities is widening.

The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) states that it aims to increase the overall enrolment to 115,000 students, and the proportion of women to 30%, by the end of 2014. However, these targets are highly unlikely to be achieved, given the current levels. By comparison, women make up 65% of university students in Iran and 41.5% in India. Looking back over the last five years, the CSO offers the following figures, which highlight the growing difference between male and female student numbers.

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In simple numerical terms the difference between the number of male and female students has increased from 32,073 in 2007-8 to 48,032 in 2011-12.

Cultural barriers continue to hinder progress in this area. By the time women reach university age (and indeed before this) they are often married and are restricted from pursuing further academic aspirations. Most people appreciate the importance of some form of education for girls, but this becomes harder to justify the older the child gets. Since children often complete primary education later than international standards, many women would progress through to university long past the typical marriage age acceptable to many families.

The gap between women and men in tertiary education is likely partly exacerbated by the fact that of the 4,873 university teachers (in both government and private institutions), only 603 (12.4%) of them are women, with several universities (Kandahar, Khost, Paktia, Ghazni, Helmand, and Kunar universities) without a single female teacher. Another obstacle may be places in female dormitories. Of the 34,104 students in dormitories, only 2,006 (5.9%) are women. Some provinces do not have any places for female students in dormitories, including Khost, Takhar, Badakhshan, Jawzjan, Kunar, and Laghman. Even if a girl gains a seat at a university in a location where it might be feasible to attend, universities often do not have adequate dormitory

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162 Ibid, 58.
facilities for female students, and she may be unable to attend university due to inappropriate housing options. Interestingly, the gap in the graduation rate is narrower than the enrolment gap. In 2012, a total of 12,275 students graduated from government universities, with 2,713 (22.1%) of them being women (compared to 19% of the overall student body).  

There are, of course, other important factors that may impact on the number of women in universities. The university entrance exam (the Kankur), allocates both degree courses and actual universities to students, so students may not necessarily be allocated to attend their nearest university (for example, in their provincial centre). A girl who does earn a seat in university may not be able to take it up, as she does not have the flexibility to select a university she may be supported by her family to attend. The proportion of girls writing the Kankur exam is increasing year on year, from 25.8% in 2009/10 to 29.4% in 2012/13. However, increasing girls writing the Kankur has not closed the gap between proportions of women and men at universities. There are few university seats available, as compared to the growing number of secondary school graduates. Each year secondary school graduates increase, but university opportunities have not kept pace, making competition stronger.  

In addition to universities, there are many technical and vocational education/training providers in Afghanistan, either private, offered through NGOs, or offered by several branches of the Government. In order to ensure that young people are trained in skills relevant to the Afghan labor market, MoE and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Martyrs, and the Disabled (MoLSAMD) aim to increase the number of TVET institutions across the country and to increase the enrolment of girls to 30%. TVET centers are an important part of reconstruction and development efforts in Afghanistan as they help to build a capable, responsive workforce that will contribute to economic growth.  

However, figures show that while the total number of female students has increased since 2009, as with other education institutions, the gap is widening between male and female students. Moreover, the percentage of students who

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163 Ibid, 55.
are female (15.3%) is still far short of the government target. This is largely because many of the vocational areas of training are traditionally dominated by men and are often sectors that women would find it very difficult to function within, given current cultural constraints.

As mentioned, there are also a series of private providers of TVET services. However, these have sometimes been uncoordinated, and links between vocational training supply and market demand have often not been thoroughly researched. Despite a proliferation of training centers and courses, skilled workers still often must be imported from abroad as they are not available locally. Key areas of training include business, IT, mechanics, construction, and textiles.\(^{166}\)

That said, the World Bank-funded National Skills Development and Market Linkages Program (NSDP) was one such program that saw strong employment-related results for women. In Bamyan, women's employment rose to 81% higher for those who participated in the program than for those who did not. In Badakhshan, although employment rates did not rise dramatically, women's income among the trained group rose to five times higher than those who did not participate in the program. By contrast, in Khost, wages rose slightly, but employment rates rose from 14% for women outside of the program, to 70% for women who went through the program. In

\(^{166}\) Ibid, 14 – 15.
Samangan and Kandahar, employment rates increased slightly, but wage earning increased three-fold.167

Policy Implications

This chapter has highlighted a number of practicable methods that have been demonstrated to improve education for girls and women in Afghanistan. Capitalizing on considerable momentum, recommendations for the future include:

1. **Access to Appropriate Education Facilities** – Extend coverage of government schools to become closer to communities, and ensure that boundary walls, water supply, separate latrines, books, and supplies are available at each school. This will require a systematic budgetary exercise to upgrade existing facilities such that girls can derive maximum advantage from existing infrastructure, while planning for expanded coverage. Consider transportation options for children, especially girls.

2. **Community-based Education** – Expand the CBE model for areas which do not currently have regular government schools. Work to integrate CBE classes as part of a wider network of government education facilities, supporting CBE teachers and capitalizing on knowledge gained from existing CBE implementers.

3. **Female Teachers** – Support and expand the District TTC model already functioning, and continue to monitor and measure its impact on female teacher levels. Develop further models for incentivising female teachers to teach in more remote or underserved areas.

4. **School Security** – Work to minimize attacks on schools, firstly by not using schools for purposes beyond education, which may politicize the facilities and locations. Further analyze recent cases to better understand them.

5. **Transition Years and Drop-out Rates** – Provide additional support for girls during years that show statistically high drop-out rates, in an effort to intervene at the highest risk points in the retention of girls in school.

6. **Tertiary Education** – Invest in various tertiary education programs that produce professionals for social service delivery (i.e. in health,

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education, justice), and create incentives and affirmative action measures to bring women into the programs and deploy them upon graduation. Perform strong market analysis for skills development training, to ensure employability and income generation possibilities for female trainees.
Chapter 4: Work and Employment
In 2005, the World Bank’s Gender Country Assessment focused on the predominantly agrarian nature of Afghanistan’s economy, women’s largely unpaid participation in various elements of horticultural and livestock employment, and the gender division of labor in the agricultural sector. The general structure of the agriculture sector and the way women participate within it remains largely similar to 2005. Urban and formal employment of women has slowly grown, at least in specific sectors; however, many more professional women are needed to ensure access to various services for other women. The majority of women are employed in domestic labor in their own households, are involved in agricultural production, and take part in various other types of informal labor. Many women are involved in handicrafts such as tailoring, carpet weaving and embroidery, which may be for their own families or may be for sale.

Despite the upward trend of women in formal or paid employment, the findings presented below show that strong cultural norms and economic pressures often tie women to activities that are of low economic value. Even

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those women who do take part in the formal economy are generally less well paid than men and have fewer managerial opportunities.

A significant challenge to analyzing the employment and economic activity of women is a lack of data. Compared to the health and education sectors, in which there is a large volume of at times contradictory statistical information, Afghanistan’s labor market suffers from a dearth of fundamental information, and very little is gender disaggregated. Women’s employment is particularly difficult to measure, since it is comprised primarily of reproductive labor and informal labor (often unpaid). Characteristics of informality are common to the Afghan economy in general, but are particularly prevalent as related to women’s work, making women’s work an additional challenge to measure and study. However, there are some indicative studies, which can help researchers piece together the complex issue of women and work in Afghanistan. The most recent NRVA (2007/08) is a key source for looking at women’s employment. Based on the information available, the following represents part of the picture of women’s employment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>2005 Report</th>
<th>Latest Figure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labor Force Participation</td>
<td>35.8% (women and men)</td>
<td>Overall – 67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Hours of Formal Work/Week</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Women – 30 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Working Women in Vulnerable Employment</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Men – 39 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the information available:

- Labor Force Participation: 35.8% (women and men).
- Average Hours of Formal Work/Week: Not available.
- Percentage of Working Women in Vulnerable Employment: 95%.

**Table 9: Key Employment Indicators for Women**

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169 Although the NRVA 2012/13 is forthcoming, the indicators will not be directly comparable to 2007/08.
171 Even in 2005, this was a disputed figure. The figure was based on another World Bank source: http://devdata.worldbank.org/external/dgsector/asp?W=0&RMDK=110&SMDK=473885, and is discussed on p.111 of the 2005 Country Gender Assessment (footnote 168). Whilst more concrete figures were not available at that time, experience in other similarly conflict-affected states, with comparable levels of poverty, consistently demonstrates much higher levels of women’s employment (often informal), simply based on household survival imperatives. Already at that time, the given data did not match the NRVA 2003/04 data as well. As this chapter explores, this is largely due to ongoing challenges in defining and measuring women’s work in Afghanistan.
173 This does not include what is considered “reproductive” labor, including household cleaning, child care, cooking, etc. This distinction is explored further below, under the sub-heading “Women in Afghanistan’s Economy”.
174 Ibid, 33.
175 Ibid, 25.
Although the above table lists women’s working hours as being significantly less than those of men, this is primarily a demonstration of the above-mentioned difficulty in measuring their work. Women’s true work hours and labor force participation are very difficult to calculate in an environment where they are often not well-integrated into the formal paid economy. This issue is discussed in greater detail in the below sub-section “Women and Afghanistan’s Economy”.

Using the available data from some larger quantitative studies, along with qualitative work, this chapter will explore the modalities of women’s work, both in agriculture and other growing sectors in Afghanistan, and in the closely linked informal and formal economies.

**Women and Afghanistan’s Economy**

In general, the informal sector\(^1\) dominates the labor market in Afghanistan, while the formal sector is underdeveloped, with the public sector making up its majority.\(^2\) This means that a large percentage of the workforce, both in rural and urban areas, is working in informal, sometimes unpaid, and/or subsistence employment. Formal labor market opportunities in Afghanistan are extremely limited, representing only 9.4% of total employment nationwide. The urban/rural disaggregation demonstrates that formal employment makes up 29% of urban jobs, and only 6% of rural jobs.\(^3\) Women’s employment is more likely to fall within the informal economy than that of men, and it is also more likely to be unpaid.

In addition to being characterized by informality, women’s employment is doubly difficult to measure, as much of the work women do can be considered “reproductive” labor. Reproductive labor is unpaid labor that often takes place within the household and contributes to the ongoing functioning of the family, in contrast to work that is considered to be “productive” labor, which goes through market transactions and has a monetary value attached to it, whether

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1. The informal sector is broadly characterized as consisting of units engaged in the production of goods or services, which typically operate at a low level of organization, with little or no division between labor and capital as factors of production and on a small scale. Labor relations - where they exist - are based mostly on casual employment, kinship or personal and social relations rather than contractual arrangements with formal guarantees. Accessed 14 April 2013. [http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=1350](http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=1350).
Reproductive work often takes up the majority of women’s daily time, including household chores and childcare. With fertility rates that remain high at 5.1 children/woman, and very limited access to external childcare, the reproductive work of raising a family is enormously labor-intensive. In addition, the burden of household chores is compounded in many areas by a lack of proximate water and a lack of electricity, among other infrastructural constraints, making basic daily tasks extremely time-consuming. This work is essential for the well-being of the household and facilitates the ability of others to participate in productive labor, bolstering the whole of the nation’s economy in an often invisible way. However, it is classically difficult to measure, as it is often not considered “employment”, and both men and women tend to under-report the time women invest in reproductive labor. Reproductive labor is twice-removed from the formal economy, making it more difficult to measure than even the informal economy. Hence, women’s economic contributions are typically vastly underestimated, especially in societies where their participation rate in more formal employment is low.

Given the inability to accurately measure women’s economic contribution in reproductive labor, this chapter will focus on their productive labor, as a contribution to the formal and informal economies. However, it should be recalled throughout, that these contributions are almost always in addition to a significant number of hours of reproductive labor at home.

Looking at the distribution of employment across various sectors shows that Afghanistan is still fundamentally an agrarian society. More than half (59%) of the population is involved in agricultural activity in some form, according to the latest figures from the NRVA in 2007/8, meaning that the agriculture sector remains the most significant portion of the economy from the perspective of employing the workforce (even when counting only the licit agriculture sector, excluding poppy production, as below). Figures from this survey provide a detailed insight into which sectors employ the greatest proportion of the workforce.

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In addition to employing the workforce, the agriculture sector has also made a steadily growing contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in real numbers since 2002, as the economy has consistently expanded. Speaking proportionately, however, the contribution of licit agriculture activities to GDP is actually slightly on the decline. This is because other sectors have been growing at a faster rate, gaining proportionately over agriculture. Taking the three largest contributing sectors to Afghanistan’s GDP (agriculture, services and industry), as of 2012, nearly half (46.4%) of Afghanistan’s GDP was derived from the service sector\textsuperscript{181} (including high volume sub-sectors such as construction, security, transportation, telecoms, and IT). Industry, by comparison, has remained relatively static as a proportion of GDP, although the mining sector has begun to grow slowly in the past couple of years (from 0.6% of GDP in 2010, to 1.8% in 2012).\textsuperscript{182} The graph below demonstrates the trajectory of the agriculture, industry, and service sector contributions to GDP since 2002.

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.
While this trajectory has been fairly predictable since 2002, it may become less so. The growth of the service sector is heavily supported by the presence of international donor countries, NGOs and NATO forces. Looking ahead, it is likely that the service sector will decline as aid funds decrease in the future, and the economy may revert to a greater dependency on agriculture.

Graph 18 demonstrates proportions of the workforce across sectors, disaggregated by rural and urban areas. The picture for rural and urban areas looks strikingly different in several sectors. Agriculture is notably less significant in urban settings, with trade, services, and public administration making up higher proportions of the employment opportunities for members of the workforce. For women, agriculture is a much more common area of employment than other sectors, creating a situation where women in rural areas have significantly higher employment rates than in urban areas, although their employment in agriculture is largely unpaid and informal.
There are a number of different ways to measure levels of employment and unemployment, but informal employment through families and familial networks makes this a particularly difficult figure to estimate, especially for women. The labor force participation rate can be measured as the percentage of the workforce (defined as people who are either working or looking for work) who are employed. In 2007/8 the labor force participation rate was 67%, yet the difference between men and women in work was significant – 86% and 47% respectively.

Another way to measure the labor force participation rate is to look at the proportion of all people who are of working age (16 years and over) who are employed or unemployed – the employment-to-population ratio. In 2007/8, the proportion of people of working age who were employed was 62%, varying from 80% for men to 43% for women. The unemployment rate\(^{183}\) is the percentage of unemployed individuals within the labor force – 7% for men and women.\(^ {184}\) These figures are fairly typical of many developing countries.

Whilst the gap between female and male employment is large either way it is measured, in a regional context, a report by the World Bank in 2011 found that levels of female employment in Afghanistan were among the highest in South Asia. Only in Nepal (79%) and Bhutan (61%) are a greater proportion of

\(^{183}\) Members of the labor force are classified as “unemployed” if they satisfy the conditions of “seeking work”.

women employed. In Pakistan, only 22% of women are employed, and in India and Bangladesh, 29% of women are employed. The figure rises to 35% in the Maldives and 38% in Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{185} Still, approximately 7 out of 10 workers in Afghanistan’s workforce are men.\textsuperscript{186}

By sector, the distribution of female labor can be seen in the following graph.

Graph 19: Gender Distribution of Workers by Sector

![Gender Distribution of Workers by Sector](image)

(Source: Challenges and Opportunities for Inclusive Growth in Afghanistan, World Bank, 2013)

Although Afghan women have a higher rate of employment than some other women in South Asia, compared to men, women in Afghanistan still work fewer hours in paid employment, earn less, are more likely to work in vulnerable employment (a characteristic of informal employment), and have limited financial autonomy. Of the approximately 47% of working women, only 25% of them are working in paid employment, and of these, most are working in the informal sector.\textsuperscript{187} Regardless of which sector women work in, the NRVA reports that 96% of working women are in vulnerable employment, compared to 88% of men. The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines vulnerable employment as being informal and insecure and typified by unstable and

\textsuperscript{6}
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.
inadequate earnings, low productivity and a lack of ‘safety nets’ to mitigate risks during dire straits.\footnote{Key Indicators of the Labor Market, Sixth Edition. (International Labor Organization, 2009).}

In general, this under-employment of women and their lack of economic power is likely to have repercussions inside the household. It has been demonstrated consistently that women are more likely to dedicate larger portions of their earned income to family well-being than men, whether toward household nutrition, education, or health costs.\footnote{“Challenges and Opportunities for Inclusive Growth in Afghanistan” (forthcoming). (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2013)} With limited direct economic earnings of their own, women typically have less decision-making power over household finances as well.\footnote{“Gender Mainstreaming in Afghanistan’s Microfinance Sector: An Impact Assessment.” (Kabul: Afghan Management and Marketing Consultants and the Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan) 19-24.} This means that women’s lack of economic empowerment and very limited access to paid employment in Afghanistan negatively impacts on other development indicators for children within their households.

Rural Employment

In rural settings, female involvement in the workforce is significantly higher than in towns and cities, due to the predominance of agriculture as the majority employment sector and the role women play in production processes and household farming strategies. In these settings, just over half of the female workforce (54\%) is in employment.\footnote{National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment. (Kabul: Central Statistics Organization, 2007/8) 27.}

Despite their relatively high participation rate, women are largely confined to activities within agricultural production processes that are not related to decision-making responsibility or brokering trade exchanges with the market. As the World Bank reported in 2011, rural women have very few incentives for increasing their productivity under the current socio-economic framework.\footnote{“Understanding gender in Agricultural value chain: The cases of grape/raisins, almonds, and saffron in Afghanistan”. (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2011) 12.} This is largely because their work is often unremunerated and because they must divide their time between other household tasks like domestic chores, child-raising or caring for the elderly.
Horticulture

Agriculture is based on access to land, either in the form of ownership, or through sharecropping, tenancy, or encroaching on land without ownership. Most women in Afghanistan do not own land, despite the fact that the Civil Code and Sharia Law give them the right to do so.¹⁹³ The issue of land ownership and inheritance is highly complex, and varies widely across regions of the country and even from one community to the next, but many women who do inherit land depend on their husbands or brothers to administer land ownership claims and manage this land.¹⁹⁴ It is not uncommon for a woman to renounce her inheritance to her brother before marrying (in order to keep her land in her birth family’s possession) or, if she carries land into her marriage, to sign it over to her husband, based on cultural expectations.¹⁹⁵ According to the Gender Assessment for the Land Reform in Afghanistan (LARA) project, many people are not aware of the provisions of the Civil Code and Sharia Law, and believe that women are not allowed to own land.¹⁹⁶ Some even consider the notion of women owning land to be shameful.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, women’s agricultural labor is often working on their husband’s or family’s land through unpaid labor, except if they are very poor, in which case they may be more likely to work on the land of others. For a further discussion on land ownership issues, the 2005 Country Gender Assessment’s exploration of this issue is still relevant today.¹⁹⁸

³⁹⁷ Ibid, 21.
Most farms in Afghanistan practice subsistence farming and struggle to produce for commercial markets. The pressure to provide food for the family ties laborers (male and female) to a traditional production chain which acts as a significant barrier to reforming women’s place in agricultural production; there is little room to experiment or take risks by changing traditional production models when agriculture is so tightly linked to household survival. Farmers who own small plots of land are especially reluctant to try new technologies or techniques because the risk of failure far outweighs the potential benefits. Poorer households generally require greater involvement of female labor (and often in broader roles) than wealthier households, since they cannot afford to forfeit unpaid labor that could contribute to household livelihoods.

The traditional division of labor is deeply embedded. Qualitative research conducted in 2009 among 360 rural households in Badakhshan, Bamyan, and Kabul provinces found that women were mainly involved in roles such as weeding, harvesting and post-harvest work such as threshing and cleaning seeds. Respondents said that these roles had not changed in living memory. While these roles may be limited, this still reflects a fairly broad and external participation for women, especially in weeding and harvesting, and is more representative of some northern and central provinces as compared to other regions. In some other regions, it is more typical for women to only participate in the post-harvest processing elements, because these can be done inside the household compound.

A baseline social assessment of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock’s (MAIL’s) National Horticulture and Livestock Project (NHLP), which started in November 2012, profiled agricultural practices in 23 provinces, and noted some interesting variances. For example, in Herat, cultivation and sales were primarily a man’s role, while women were involved in drying fruit and shelling nuts. Broadly similar in Badakhshan, women do take part in the sale of some products, including vegetables. In Bamyan, Panjshir, and Daikundi, both men and women are involved in the cultivation of vegetables, cereals, and grains, and in Daikundi, orchards are harvested

primarily by women. In Takhar, women are heavily involved in harvesting, especially of vegetables. Due to this variation, the foregoing Horticulture and Livestock Project and the new NHLP have created sub-components that specifically target women through training on input supply, extension services, weed control, harvesting, post-harvest processing, packaging, and kitchen-gardening. To date, 368 female producer groups, comprised of 9,426 members, have been trained in horticultural practices by HLP. This constitutes 46% of all producer group members trained through the program.

Livestock

Traditionally, women feed animals, do the milking, collect fodder, care for young animals, and sometimes treat sick ones. However, as with horticultural practices, women are often confined to activities which can be conducted in the household vicinity and have little or no access to the wider market. Again, this means that the activities they perform are often considered to be of low value. However, there are some areas of decision-making in which women appear to take larger roles (for example, in selling milk, eggs, and wool). The following breakdown of the division of labor for livestock activities reveals some interesting distinctions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cattle</th>
<th>Sheep</th>
<th>Goats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeding</td>
<td>69.14</td>
<td>19.46</td>
<td>59.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grazing</td>
<td>11.44</td>
<td>21.89</td>
<td>7.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watering</td>
<td>63.32</td>
<td>17.90</td>
<td>51.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tending young</td>
<td>81.86</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>58.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milking</td>
<td>84.13</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>57.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treating</td>
<td>22.73</td>
<td>74.44</td>
<td>38.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchasing</td>
<td>33.65</td>
<td>65.63</td>
<td>28.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Percentage of Women’s and Men’s Responsibility in Animal Husbandry.

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The table above shows that women have greater responsibility for the maintenance and care related components of animal husbandry, and are involved in selling produce (likely locally) as many of these tasks can be performed closer to home, while men have greater responsibility for purchasing and selling livestock at the market, and for grazing. While these responsibilities range from one area to another, generally men have greater responsibilities for larger animals, while women take the majority responsibility for smaller ones.

Similar to horticultural practices, the provincial profiles prepared for the NHLP demonstrate provincial variations. For example, in Herat both men and women are heavily involved in animal husbandry, although men take a more active role with goats, and poultry are mainly looked after by women. Men butcher, shear, and sell most commodities; however, women are typically in charge of producing dairy products and selling eggs. In Badakhshan and Takhar, women take part in the shearing of sheep, and are in charge of the production of yarn from wool and of dairy products. Based on these roles, NHLP has focused on training women in livestock care, animal health, and poultry activities, since they have already been seen to regularly participate in these aspects of livestock development. As above, 9,426 members of 368 female producer groups have been trained on improved animal husbandry practices, and 25,000 women have also been supported in poultry farming through HLP.

In addition to improved horticultural and livestock practices, HLP promoted savings methods among farmers, by training on book-keeping, savings methods, inter-loaning, conducting effective meetings of savings groups, marketing, and access to finance. To date, 50% of women farmers in the program are engaged in savings activities, a stronger percentage than for male

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farmers (at 46%), and the women’s groups have higher levels of savings and greater frequency of inter-loaning per group.

One key requirement for HLP and NHLP, along with other agricultural support programs, in order to support a greater number of women in horticulture and livestock activities, is to have female extension workers. This is challenging, because extension work requires significant travel to rural areas; however, without the appropriate staff, women farmers will be overlooked. To date, HLP has been able to employ 46 female extension workers (24 for horticulture and 22 for livestock), to work with female farmers and producer groups on improved horticultural and livestock practices.

**Box 9: Support to Female Farmers**

From 2007 to 2011, Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) worked with female farmers in Parwan province, through a project called Through the Garden Gate. The project focused on the target crops of carrots, onions, tomatoes, grapes, potatoes, and cucumbers, and aimed to increase household supply, generate income for women, and involve women themselves in more aspects of horticultural value chains. The project was structured around the “lead farmer” model, where women with mobility and entrepreneurial potential are selected to be lead farmers (or group leaders) among other women. The lead farmers were typically responsible for up to 25 other women farmers. MEDA assigned a female Village Facilitator from their own staff to support every 10 lead farmers. The Village Facilitators trained lead farmers, who in turn trained and facilitated the work of the other farmers in their group. In total, MEDA trained and worked with 90 lead farmers, through female agronomists and Village Facilitators. The lead farmers were trained in farming operations and business skills, including: land preparation, crop rotation, drip irrigation, mulching, greenhouse techniques, pest/disease management, weed control, grape trellising, solar drying, storage practices, record-keeping, costing/pricing, marketing, packaging and food processing. The lead farmers passed along their knowledge by working with a total of 2,549 women among their groups.

All farmers were taught about saving, putting aside finances for inputs for the following year, and investing in possible other forms of farming (i.e. livestock). Some farmers expanded from horticulture into dairy production, using their profits. By the end of the project, 92% of the women had become savers. Some lead farmers were selected to become sales agents, and were provided additional training on how to communicate with clients and input suppliers, and link to markets in larger centers; the sales agents then supported the women farmers to access to larger markets.

Women farmers gained in income as a result of the program. Before the program, the women were earning an average of $38/year from their horticultural activities. This income rose to an average of $323/year by the end. The lead farmers had an even more dramatic increase due to being in charge of larger demonstration plots that they were then able to sell from; their income went from an average of $101/year at the beginning to $866/year by the end. In addition, 100% of lead farmers increased their productive assets (including solar driers, storage, and composters), while 31% of member farmers increased their productive assets. Women also reported better soil productivity, better use of water, eating more vegetables, and having a more diverse diet in the household.
Formal and Urban Employment

There is very limited data available about the distribution of female labor in formal employment. Overall, the NRVA figures from 2007/8 show that access to employment for women in cities is lower than in rural settings; however, access to paid and formal employment is likely higher in cities, where higher numbers of women work as teachers, health workers, and public servants. Still, these women remain a minority; while 79% of the male urban workforce is employed, only 21% of the female workforce is employed. The graph below summarizes the findings from research conducted in 2008 by MoLSAMD. The survey was conducted in all the provincial capitals except Uruzgan, Wardak and Daikundi (which were omitted largely for security reasons) and so offers a fairly reliable indicator of female urban labor distribution. The graph shows that women are primarily involved in low-income, low-civil influence roles such as tailoring, cooking, and carpet weaving. Only 3.6% of urban women are employed by the Government and only 7.1% are teachers.

MoL SAMD’s figures provide a useful overview of female employment in different sectors in urban areas, but it is not clear how the survey differentiates between women who are household wives, and women who are commercially employed in cooking or domestic services, carpet weaving or embroidery – all of which are often practiced by women in their own homes.

A much smaller study conducted by the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) in Kabul, Herat and Jalalabad in 2006, found that urban livelihoods in general are characterized by informality. Most people in the study areas were found to be employed through informal networks of friends and contacts. The

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study asserts, without statistics, that many livelihoods were heavily dependent on women and children working for extremely low incomes.\textsuperscript{205}

**Public Sector**

In terms of formal employment for women, public sector employment is typically considered more socially acceptable than the private sector. This is likely because the public sector is considered a more structured and official form of work. Women comprise approximately one fifth (21\%) of government employees according to the CSO. The difference between the number of male and female employees varies significantly according to department. For example, only 1\% of employees in the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Haj are women, whereas 54\% of employees are women in the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA).\textsuperscript{206}

The gender disparity within government jobs is even more pronounced when looking at the comparative ranks held by men and women in official positions. When expressed as percentages, only 5\% of civil servants in Position 1 are women. Indeed, above Position 4, fewer than 1 in 10 women occupy the top positions in government.

![Graph 21: Percentage of Government Positions Held by Men and Women](image)

(Source: CSO 1390)

\textsuperscript{205} "Urban Livelihoods in Afghanistan." (Kabul: Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2006) 23.

In the graph below, the public sector is broken down by ministries employing men and women. While some outcomes are predictable (like MoWA having the highest number of women), some are less so. For example, the Ministry of Defense ranks higher than MoHE, in number of women employed. It is unclear whether this is a difference in the way employees have been counted, or whether there are other reasons for this disparity. Of notable concern is the low percentage of women working in such critical ministries as the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), and MAIL. In general, the IARCSC has set a target of having more than 30% women in the civil service. As can be seen in the graph below, at present only two ministries have reached this target, while the majority of ministries are less than halfway toward reaching it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministry</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Religious Affairs and Haj</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Interior Affairs</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Public Works</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Finance</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Justice</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Commerce and Industries</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Frontiers, Ethnicities and Tribes Affairs</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Mines</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Water and Power</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Urban Development Affairs</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Repatriation and Refugees Affairs</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Communication and Information Technology</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Economy</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Information and Culture</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Higher Education</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of National Defence</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Public Health</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and the...</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Women Affairs</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The below graph (Graph 23) is broken down by male and female public sector employees in each province. Once again, provincial differences are notable. Herat province has the greatest proportion of female civil servants, comprising 34% of government employees. In many regions there are virtually no female government employees – 2% in Khost and Paktia, 3% in Uruzgan and Kunar and 4% in Ghor and Paktika. Nimroz is an interesting case study. Despite being surrounded by conservative Pakistani Baluchistan in the south and Helmand Province in the east, Nimroz appears to have a comparatively egalitarian view on female employment in the Government – 31% of government employees are women. This may be due to the close proximity to Iran and the high proportion of Afghans who lived in Iran during the Taliban rule.

The next graph (Graph 24), demonstrates a weak correlation between levels of female education and the number of female employees in the Government. In Khost Province, for example, while almost a quarter of students are female (24%), only 2% of government employees are women. In Laghman, the difference is even more striking – 44% of students are female, but only 5% of government employees are women.
The weak correlation shown above suggests that factors other than the availability of educated women determine the proportion of female civil servants at a provincial level. These factors may include security concerns, cultural values, mobility constraints, non-women-friendly environments within the workplace, a lack of childcare options, and early marriage rates, among other issues. These issues are discussed further under the below sub-heading “Other Employment Issues Affecting Women”.

As has been highlighted in both the health and education chapters (Chapters 2 and 3), and above related to agricultural extension workers, it is critical that women be employed in social service delivery sectors, in order to expand access to these services.

(Source: CSO 1390, MoE)
for women and girls. Due to regional variances in security and accessibility, urban areas and more secure provinces tend to have significantly higher numbers of women working in social service delivery sectors (and the public sector in general). These are also the areas that have more access to higher levels of education for women, including professional training at TTCs, midwifery or nursing schools, TVET opportunities, etc. (for more information on TVET and vocational training, see p.90-2). This becomes a self-reinforcing cycle, in which provinces and areas with better female education opportunities have more women in service delivery, which allows more women and girls to access services, which in turn makes it more likely that they too will be able to continue into higher education and or training, and so on. The downstream effect on women of not having enough female health workers, teachers, legal professionals, agronomists, etc. has been discussed in the foregoing chapters, on p. 51 and p. 76 respectively, above under the sub-heading “Rural Employment”, and in the following chapter on p.148. This is a challenge that must be addressed through means of affirmative action and targeted efforts, in order to break this negative cycle.

**Private Enterprise**

Although agriculture and the public sector account for a large part of the workforce, non-agricultural private enterprise contributes to employing Afghanistan’s workforce as well. Women tend to be severely underrepresented in private enterprise due to more acute barriers to their participation, since work in private enterprise sectors often depends on activities and networks of relationships that take place outside the home. As in many countries, as women increasingly enter the workforce, they are more likely to enter through social service or public sector jobs than they are in private enterprise. Key obstacles to women’s success in private enterprise include, a lack of financial decision-making power, limited mobility, the necessity to conduct regular and time-consuming household chores and provide childcare, limited access to market-related knowledge, and more limited personal networks than men. As mentioned above, there is less acceptability related to women working in the private sector, as compared to the public sector.

While some of these issues may be salient in all forms of women’s employment, the latter two issues (limited knowledge and personal networks), are particularly critical for private enterprise. Most business transactions take place between men, so women often have very little understanding of the
wider market, including demand dynamics and pricing norms. In addition, one of the conditions for accessing the job market in Afghanistan is to have a strong network of personal contacts, whether through a large family structure or outside relationships. In an environment where only a small minority of women participate in formal employment, women are unlikely to have large networks of personal or professional contacts; if a woman does work in the formal sector, there will not be many other women around her who do, and forging professional contacts with men is socially difficult. In addition, a lack of mobility makes it hard for women to expand their network of relationships to potential business contacts outside of their immediate family groups. Despite this, a recent perception-based study conducted by Building Markets surveyed small and medium enterprise owners across all 34 provinces, and found that 98% of people say that the proportion of women in the private sector has increased significantly since 2001, and 93% say there are more women working in the private sector now than there were 2 years ago. While the data does not exist to statistically verify these perceptions, they represent a growing awareness of women in private enterprise. In addition, the recent Business Bottleneck Survey, conducted in Kabul and Balk provinces, found that 81% of respondents believed that more women should run a company, where only 12% believed that only men should run businesses.

In order to assess the number of private non-agricultural enterprises in Afghanistan, a survey was conducted in 2009, among 2,334 commercial establishments. According to the surveyed establishments, the following trends existed among their staff:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 11: Workers' Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paid</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full-time</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Managerial</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nationals</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

212 Ibid, xii.
The study estimated that nationwide, there were around 402,000 private establishments employing 1.2 million people. In several private sub-sectors, women comprised over half of the labor force; in manufacturing they make up 57%, and in private education, 56%. However, both of these sectors are among the most poorly paid sub-sectors, as compared to private enterprise sectors like transport, storage, and real estate, in which there are virtually no women.\textsuperscript{213} The graph below demonstrates the leading private enterprise sectors operating in Afghanistan, and highlights the areas where women tend to be employed. While the proportion of manufacturing sector employees who are women is significant, unfortunately, the manufacturing sector only accounts for 5% of nationwide employment.\textsuperscript{214} This is a sector that has been shown to increase women’s employment in other countries, and if scaled up, could be a high potential sector for women in Afghanistan.

Research conducted in 2007 among 1,019 adults on behalf of the Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan (MISFA),\textsuperscript{215} found that many women did not have authority to make financial decisions alone, even

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{213}Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{214}“Challenges and Opportunities for Inclusive Growth in Afghanistan” (forthcoming). (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2013)
  \item \textsuperscript{215}Greeley, M. and Chaturvedi, M. “Microfinance in Afghanistan: A baseline and initial impact study for MISFA.” (Kabul: MISFA,2007) 43.
\end{itemize}
regarding their own money. This supports the findings from the NRVA, which found that even among women who generate income themselves, only 20% decide how to spend their money alone.\textsuperscript{216} However, many women also report having \textit{some} control over financial decision-making. Some described scenarios of joint decision-making in the household, in which they were participants.\textsuperscript{217} The concept of wholly independent financial decision-making in a household is complex, and findings on this and similar indicators may often be more influenced by the perception of respondents or interviewers, rather than a direct reflection of reality.

\textbf{Box 10: International Centre for Women’s Economic Empowerment}

The International Centre for Women’s Economic Empowerment opened in the Spring of 2013 at the American University for Afghanistan, the first of its kind in Afghanistan. Its mandate includes advocating for legal reforms and work environment policies that will better support women in business; carrying out research, facilitating dialogue, and disseminating information around women’s contribution to the economy; and offering training to women entrepreneurs on business planning and market analysis.

\section*{Access to Finance}

One barrier to women’s participation in private enterprise and/or financial decision-making is access to finance. Since many women work solely in unpaid employment (whether in the form of household tasks, in agriculture, or in some other form of unpaid labor contribution), they often do not have financing available to them in order to make decisions about the household, develop business-related skills, and possibly invest in their own income generation ventures. For example, only 3% of Afghan women have a bank account (compared to 9% of men). This compares to an average of 26% of women in South Asia as a whole.\textsuperscript{218}

The Government of Afghanistan, the World Bank, and other agencies in Afghanistan have sought to address this issue through several models designed to enhance access to finance. To date, there are more than 400,000

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{216} National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment. (Kabul: Central Statistics Organization, 2007/8) 107.

\textsuperscript{217} Greeley, M. and Chaturvedi, M. “Microfinance in Afghanistan: A baseline and initial impact study for MISFA.” (Kabul: MISFA,2007) 43.

\end{footnotesize}
microfinance clients in Afghanistan, of which 38% are women.\textsuperscript{219} For example, MISFA, established in 2003, exists to promote and fund microfinance initiatives. At present, MISFA has 195,649 active borrowers nationwide, 58.9% of which are women.\textsuperscript{220} Research conducted among 400 MISFA clients in four provinces - Kabul, Nangarhar, Balkh and Herat - shows that the program has been successful in enhancing household security and empowering women who participate.\textsuperscript{221} Almost all female clients (99%) said that their level of self-confidence had increased after taking a loan. Similarly, in 2012 AREU studied 57 women who had participated in MISFA microfinance programming in Mazar-i-Sharif (Balkh Province), and found that access to microfinance loans had enhanced women’s decision-making responsibility in the household.\textsuperscript{222} As a MISFA partner, the First Microfinance Bank (FMFB) is also a key micro-loan provider. As of December 2012, FMFB has 54,000 borrowers, with 16% of them being women.

\textsuperscript{220} "Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan Sector Update." Accessed 02 June 1013. \texttt{http://www.misfa.org.af/}.
\textsuperscript{222} "The Impact of Microfinance Programmes on Women’s Lives: A Case Study in Balkh Province." (Kabul: Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2012) 2.
Savings Groups and Enterprise Groups that provide financial training, microloans, and help to establish women’s cooperatives and women-run businesses are facilitated by the World Bank-funded Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Program (AREDP) of MRRD, along with similar models implemented by a number of NGOs in Afghanistan. For many women, the access to finance and financial literacy provided by these kinds of programs helps them become more respected members of their households, interact with other women, share information with each other, and have more decision-making power. As noted above in the sub-section “Women and Afghanistan’s Economy”, this can aid with many aspects of household well-being, including children’s education, nutrition, etc. as women often invest more of their income in household needs than men.

Despite these positive results, some caution should be exercised related to women in microfinance programming. Because the uptake among women and reported effect on “empowerment” is often high in microfinance programs, microfinance can at times be looked at as a means of fixing the majority of women’s problems. However, microfinance programs that lend to women have been more successful at contributing to household well-being than they have been at systematically helping to address women’s social needs. In some cases, women have appeared to simply hand loan money over to their husbands or other male family members, who were allowed to fully administer the loan. Simply bringing money into the household can increase women’s status and treatment at home; however, some programs have gone further in promoting women’s financial participation and decision-making. For this reason, it is important to distinguish microfinance programming that succeeds in actively involving women, increasing their knowledge, and creating a platform for them to interact with each other, from programming that simply allows women to bring finances into their households to be managed and decided upon by others.

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Other Employment Issues Affecting Women

Female-headed Households

Unfortunately, with social strictures regarding female mobility, along with a lack of structural support for women’s employment, it is very difficult for many women to survive independently in Afghanistan. This creates a hardship for female-headed households (FHHs), and also dictates that many women will remain within households that may not be safe for them, knowing that they will struggle to earn a livelihood if they leave. For women who do find themselves as heads of their households (most often as widows), they are likely to be in a highly vulnerable position in terms of income, security, social protection, and availability and access to food. Some sources have estimated that there are at least 700,000 war widows in Afghanistan. Estimates from the NRVA and CSO have put FHHs at between 2 – 3.3% of the overall population, although this is difficult to measure due to the cultural hesitancy to admit to being a FHH. This figure is notably lower than other conflict-affected countries, and most likely reflects under-reporting. It is common for household survey respondents to cite a male relative or a younger son as a household head, rather than label their household as female-headed, even if he does not primarily support the family.

Mobility

As has been seen repeatedly throughout this report, restrictions on mobility hamper women’s access and limit their opportunities in Afghanistan. This is a key factor in women’s employment across sectors, and impacts their ability to get and keep a job. In a survey of public sector employees, 37% of women reported having difficulty commuting to and from the office. In many cases, specific policies, provisions, or initiatives are required, in order to provide extra support to women to overcome mobility challenges.

Many organizations seeking to employ more women develop policies and approaches to address common barriers women face in formal employment. For organizations or agencies delivering services at local levels, recruiting women for job placements in their home community or district is a key

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strategy for increasing and retaining women among their staff. This strategy can also often facilitate the work itself, as these women may be able to interact with local communities more freely because they are from the same area. Another strategy often used is the adoption of a *Mahram* policy (where women staff members are supported to bring a family member to work or on work-related travel as a caretaker).\(^{227}\) In some cases, couples are hired if both husband and wife are qualified for roles within the same organization (or brother and sister teams), such that the female employee has an employed relative already in the office with her. Still other options include the provision of transportation shuttles, on site accommodation (for example, in remote health facilities), security measures, and policies that mandate that women travel with one or more other female staff members.

**Women-friendly Workplaces**

Anecdotally, some women complain about workplace environments that are not sufficiently woman-friendly. Being in a small minority in most workplaces, many women feel intimidated by the male-dominated environment they work in. The prevailing opinion among some male staff members is that a “proper” woman remains at home and only interacts with male family members; therefore a woman’s interactions with male colleagues can be challenging. A study in 2009 on women in government decision-making positions found that one third of the women interviewed cited insecurity, discrimination, lack of support, and intimidation as issues in the workplace.\(^{228}\) Many workplaces in Afghanistan lack any policy provisions or human resource support to improve these issues, and these challenges remain poorly understood.

**Childcare**

Women and even some ministries have noted that a lack of childcare options creates a significant barrier for women. In the past (during the PDPA regime in the late 1970s – 80s), many ministries and government offices provided childcare for employees. However, now private or employer-provided childcare is not common; there are a total of 347 kindergartens and nurseries registered in Afghanistan, 211 of which are located at the workplace. These are primarily available in Afghanistan’s major urban centers.\(^{229}\) A lack of childcare

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\(^{227}\) “Gender Equality: Policies and Programmes”. (Kabul: Food Security and Agriculture Cluster, 13).


options makes the hours of a public servant or self-employed business-owner more challenging for women who are still typically expected to take the majority of the responsibility for childcare in the home. Some ministries in Kabul have begun to offer childcare options, but this is unlikely in the provincial level departments. A lack of childcare options is a barrier to women’s employment in all sectors which are not home-based.

**Policy Implications**

Despite being highly active in various forms of employment, women are far less likely to be in paid employment, and are under-represented even in sectors that are most critical for women’s involvement (i.e. health work, education, justice, and public sector government positions). The following are key recommendations for increasing support to women’s employment:

1. **Women in Agriculture** – Support agricultural value chains that allow for greater participation of women and support the expansion of models proven to include women in more diverse stages of the value chain such that their knowledge and roles can expand.

2. **Education for Social Sector Employment** – Women’s participation in health, education, justice, other social services, and in the civil service is critical. Develop policies and systems to encourage their higher education to qualify for these roles, and incentives for women to work in these sectors across the country.

3. **Skills Development** – Link vocational training or other support to women’s skills development directly to markets, based on sound analysis. Avoid stereotypical trainings that may not lead to genuine income generation opportunities. Ensure that women can be included in emerging sectors (such as ICT), in which gender norms are less established.

4. **Childcare, Mobility, and Woman-friendly Workplaces** – The public sector should lead the way in developing models of access to affordable childcare, safe transportation options, and positive working environments for women, to help attract women to formal employment and retain positions once they have taken up work.

5. **Access to Finance** – Support microfinance programs that facilitate access to finance at local levels. Be sure to deliberately incorporate elements of women’s savings groups, women’s cooperatives, training to women in literacy, numeracy, and other skills, or programming that requires the active participation of women and their interaction with each other in other ways.
Chapter 5: Legal Rights and Voice

The 2005 Gender Country Assessment outlined legal framework reforms which had been recently gained by a new constitution and the signing of international treaties (as outlined in the Introduction to this report, p.23). It then outlined the handling of cases such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, as they are coded under Afghan law. Similarly, the report discussed the prominence and values of traditional justice mechanisms, and their impact on women’s lives.\(^{230}\) Today, these issues still affect women in broadly similar ways and the challenges discussed persist; however, new dynamics have entered the dialogue about women’s rights and access to justice. While comprehensive data collection is still a gap in this sector, and continues to hamper the ability to fully understand the justice experience women have in Afghanistan, a number of studies have filled out the field of knowledge somewhat, and contributed to improved understanding of justice issues for women.

In terms of political participation and voice in society, there have been some positive advancement for women. The establishment of a democratic political system in 2004 led to millions of women casting votes in successive rounds of

elections since then, and hundreds competing as political candidates (including as presidential candidates). Due to strong quota systems put in place to ensure women’s access to political office, Afghanistan is among the countries with the highest rates of women in electable political office in the world. Some women have also contested unreserved seats, and a few have won. Women’s access to modern media and participation in the communications sector has also increased.

### Table 12: Key Indicators for Women’s Access to Justice and Political Voice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>2005 Report(^{231}) or Previous Elections</th>
<th>Latest Figure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Female Judges</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>4.7(^{232})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Female Attorneys</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.1(^{233})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Female Prosecutors</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.4(^{234})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimation of Girls’ Marriage Age</td>
<td>16% Under 15 Years 52% Under 18 Years</td>
<td>57% of marriages involve an under 16-year-old;(^{235}) 17% of 15 – 19-year-olds are married(^{236})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Women in the Afghan National Police (ANP)</td>
<td>180 or 0.3% of the force (2005)(^{237})</td>
<td>1,506(^{238})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of ANP Family Response Units</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>152 (staffed by 317 female officers)(^{239})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Violence Against Women Cases Reported</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,010 (latest 6 month period available)(^{240})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Voter Turn-out</td>
<td>41% (2004 elections)</td>
<td>39% (2009-10 elections)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Parliamentary Candidates</td>
<td>335 (2005)(^{241})</td>
<td>406 (2010)(^{242}) (413)(^{243})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected Female Members of Parliament (Lower)</td>
<td>68 (27%) in the 2005</td>
<td>69 (28%) in 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^{232}\) Ibid.

\(^{233}\) Ibid.

\(^{234}\) Ibid.


### Legal Rights

Since 2005, progress has been slow as related to women’s legal rights. Due to some legal reform, there is a more robust legal framework for protecting...
women and prosecuting various acts of violence perpetrated against them – some of which have been criminalized for the first time in Afghanistan’s history. This legal advancement has come in the form of the enactment of the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW Law) in August 2009, through presidential decree, which criminalised child marriage, forced marriage, forcing self-immolation, and rape among 18 other crimes. However, at the time of writing, the EVAW Law had been recently brought before Parliament for debate, and some strong objections had been raised against some of its articles. The Law was then passed to committee for further examination and possible amendment recommendations, with an unclear pending outcome. Another law, the Family Law, has been drafted (but not yet presented to Parliament or the President), which if passed, would further code issues of custody, marriage, and divorce, which were not covered in the EVAW Law. Thirdly, the draft amended Land Management Law proposes to recognize the nikah khat (marriage document noting the mahr received by a bride) as valid proof of land ownership if land was part of the bride price negotiated. This law, if passed, would strengthen a woman’s claim to land ownership. These and other pieces of legislation, including the 2008 Anti-Trafficking Law, have strengthened or could further strengthen in future the legal framework of rights and protections for women. However, despite these advancements toward strengthening women’s status under the law, in practice, women’s access to justice remains extremely limited.

Crimes Against Women

Typical crimes against women or involving women in Afghanistan are cases of violence (including rape, immolation, beating, “honor killing”, or some other kind of abuse), zina or adultery (or alleged adultery), forced marriage (including the practices of ba’ad or ba’adal, giving a woman to settle a dispute, or exchanging girls between families), and underage marriage. Other legal cases related to women are often related to marriage, bride price, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. For the six month period from 21 March – 21 October 2012, data obtained by UNAMA on reported cases in 22 provinces showed that the highest number of reported cases were rape (220 cases), followed by “home escape” (119), honor killing (95), forced self-immolation


\[245^*\] Honor killing is the practice of killing a woman suspected of moral crimes. The killing is usually performed by the men in a woman’s family, and it is believed to preserve the honor and name of the family.

\[246^*\] Ibid.
(85) or suicide, and other forms of murder. A few cases were reported of underage marriage, forced marriage, ba'ad, and forced prostitution. The case of “home escape” is an area of legal confusion; while running away is not illegal under the law, women and girls doing so are often arrested. Allegedly, this is because there is the assumption of intent to commit another crime (i.e. adultery); girls may be charged on grounds of “pre-emptive zina” or some such intent-related crime, which are not actually criminalized under any legal code in Afghanistan. In general women experience very high levels of violence in Afghanistan. In 2008, a Global Rights report based on a survey of 4,700 households, estimated that 87% of Afghan women had experienced some form of abuse, and 62% of women had experienced some sort of violence at home.

**Accessing Justice**

As is the case for accessing health and education services and employment opportunities, one of the key barriers to women’s access to justice services across Afghanistan is their limited mobility. Poor physical access to formal courts and prosecutors’ offices is one of the main reasons why people resort to traditional and informal justice systems, especially in rural areas. The lack of physical access to formal courts or justice-related offices is particularly problematic for women, who often must be accompanied by a mahram, or male family member when they travel. Travelling with a male family member is particularly problematic if a woman would like to report a case of violence occurring in the home.

The vast majority of Afghan women report having little contact with state institutions, the justice system or civil society organizations. It is difficult to confirm whether this is because these institutions are too far from them to be accessible, or whether many women are simply unaware that they exist. The Asia Foundation Survey of the Afghan People 2011 found that 77% of people say that there is no organization, institution or authority to which women can go to have their problems solved in their area. While this perception is high nationwide, regional variations demonstrate that women feel they have somewhat more access to organizations that can help them seek justice in eastern and western provinces than in the Southwest or Central regions.

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However, given that these responses are perception-based, women may also have higher expectations and greater awareness in some regions than others.

Of the overall 19% who did agree such organizations existed, 23% identified the provincial level Directorate of Women’s Affairs (DoWA) as the organization that women could go to, 18% a women’s shura, and 12% a village/elder’s shura. Human Right’s Offices (13%) and District Governor’s offices were also mentioned (12%), whereas state courts were identified by only 5% of respondents as a potential institution where women can go to resolve their problems. There were also significant discrepancies between urban and rural areas. DoWAs, Human Rights Offices, women’s shuras, and state courts are all mentioned in greater proportions in urban areas. Rural respondents are much more likely to report crimes to village/elder’s shuras (26%), than those living in urban areas (14%), demonstrating that urban women feel they have a wider range of justice options than rural women, largely due to physical access. Though there are now between 250 – 300 lawyers providing legal aid in the country (compared to nearly zero ten years ago), this figure is still far lower than what is needed given the isolation and difficult travel still prevalent in most of the country. For a further discussion, see the below sub-section (“Female Legal Professionals”). Moreover, female professionals remain a small minority within the legal system.

One of the key access challenges that women face is the responsiveness and capacity of the ANP in their area. Reporting to the police is often the first step in engaging in a judicial process. The ability of the ANP to deal with sexual

\[\text{Graph 26: Perception of Availability of Justice-related Institutions for Women}\]

Of the overall 19% who did agree such organizations existed, 23% identified the provincial level Directorate of Women’s Affairs (DoWA) as the organization that women could go to, 18% a women’s shura, and 12% a village/elder’s shura. Human Right’s Offices (13%) and District Governor’s offices were also mentioned (12%), whereas state courts were identified by only 5% of respondents as a potential institution where women can go to resolve their problems. There were also significant discrepancies between urban and rural areas. DoWAs, Human Rights Offices, women’s shuras, and state courts are all mentioned in greater proportions in urban areas. Rural respondents are much more likely to report crimes to village/elder’s shuras (26%), than those living in urban areas (14%), demonstrating that urban women feel they have a wider range of justice options than rural women, largely due to physical access. Though there are now between 250 – 300 lawyers providing legal aid in the country (compared to nearly zero ten years ago), this figure is still far lower than what is needed given the isolation and difficult travel still prevalent in most of the country. For a further discussion, see the below sub-section (“Female Legal Professionals”). Moreover, female professionals remain a small minority within the legal system.

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One of the key access challenges that women face is the responsiveness and capacity of the ANP in their area. Reporting to the police is often the first step in engaging in a judicial process. The ability of the ANP to deal with sexual
violence or gender-based violence (or the perception that they are able to), along with the physical proximity of police stations to communities, strongly impacts the likelihood of a case of violence against women being reported. To give women greater access to police services, the MoI created Family Response Units (FRUs), located at some police stations. Mainly composed of female staff, they are mandated to address a wide set of criminal and civil family-related matters. In practice however, FRUs do not appear to have Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for investigating and referring cases, are often relegated to a counselling role (rather than a police function), and tend to take a mediation approach that is intended to return women back to their families, rather than documenting the cases and referring them to the legal system. This may be due to the realization that women have few options once they have pressed charges against a family member or exposed sensitive cases to wider knowledge; even if they win their case, they are unlikely to be taken back by their family, have few options for living independently, and may in fact be in danger of reprisals. At any rate, mediation approaches are often used in cases of violence against women, rather than formal legal processing. In addition, some female ANP officers have reported difficult working environments within the ANP, which main restrain their ability to respond to female victims.

**Box 11: Police Training**

A collection of key actors in Afghanistan are involved in police training, some with the explicit intent of sensitizing and preparing the ANP for dealing with gender-based violence. In 2011, UNFPA published a comprehensive manual on training police on Violence Against Women (VAW) for the Ministry of Interior-run Police Academy. The manual, entitled “Police Taking Action On Violence Against Women”, covers key definitions and legal codification around crimes against women, types and frequency of cases seen in Afghanistan, Islam’s principles around VAW, and specific skills required of police officers like the identification and reporting of cases, how to conduct effective and sensitive investigations, and how to ensure the protection of victims. The manual walks police officers through real cases from Afghanistan, and teaches them the proper steps to responding to these cases.

**Awareness, Mistrust, and Stigma**

As can be seen in relation to physical access, it is difficult to ascertain when women do not access justice services because they are not available or reliable, or when they do not access justice because of a lack of awareness, social stigma, or fear of consequences. The low level of female literacy (12%) exacerbates difficulties in accessing information about existing legal rights, and local authorities themselves often conflate traditional values with legal

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provisions. There is also a significant degree of stigma attached to bringing domestic conflict into the public sphere, and few options for women after they do so. As a result, crimes against women remain under-reported. According to a baseline study performed by the United Nations Fund for Population Affairs (UNFPA) in three provinces (Kabul, Nangarhar, and Bamyan), a majority of female respondents said that the only appropriate or accessible place where women victims of violence can discuss what has happened and receive help is at the local health facility. Other locations (including police stations, formal justice institutions, DoWAs, and other government offices) were too difficult to reach, or visiting them elicited too much suspicion and gossip from the community or family. A health facility was also the easiest place to request a mahram to travel to with a woman, making it more probable that she could access the facility without arousing suspicion. From this survey, it is clear that social stigma plays a significant role in women’s access to justice.

Box 12: Integrating Justice and Health in a Response to Violence Against Women

In 2013, UNFPA began partnering with WHO, UN Women, MOPH and other organizations to pilot the establishment of one-stop assistance centers for victims of gender-based violence in health facilities, as part of the Health for all Afghans National Priority Program. This initiative is based on a 2011 study on gender-based violence in 3 provinces (Nangarhar, Bamyan, and Kabul), that demonstrated that most women believe that a health facility is the most acceptable and accessible place to go for help as a victim of violence. However, the study also found that health facilities do not have standard operating procedures for dealing with these cases, and are often isolated from the justice system, without a clear referral mechanism for female victims of violence. The pilot aims to establish these standard procedures and a referral system, train health professionals to properly respond to victims of violence, and integrate psychosocial and legal counseling services into the centers within health facilities, such that women victims simultaneously receive legal advice, mental health support, and medical treatment.

Compounding social stigma is the reality that many Afghans do not trust the formal legal system, due to the pervasive practice of bribery and corruption in the settling of cases. In fact, 40% of people disagree or disagree strongly that the state courts are fair and trusted. Findings of a 2010 study by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) show that 52% of Afghan adults paid at least one bribe to a public official during the previous 12 months. The prevalence of bribery is higher in rural areas than in towns (respectively 56%...
and 46%), but remains high in both cases. In urban areas, 39% of women paid bribes, mostly to civil servants. Bribes are requested at all levels of the legal system, with police officers the most likely to request bribes, followed by municipal and provincial officers, judges, and prosecutors.\textsuperscript{254} There are many anecdotal stories of police officers being bribed to release men who have committed “honor” crimes or domestic violence, without being brought to the legal system, and still further cases where prosecutors or judges have been bribed in the same vein.

Despite this negative trend, levels of trust in the government justice system are higher as of 2011 than in 2006; 55% of respondents in the Survey of the Afghan People had a great deal or a fair amount of confidence in the government justice system, compared to only 38% in 2006. However, no gender disaggregated data is available for further analysis of this metric,\textsuperscript{255} so it is currently not possible to determine whether the judiciary is being viewed more favorably by women.

\section*{Multiple Legal Frameworks}

One of the complicating factors for women’s legal status in Afghanistan is that the Afghan legal system combines different, overlapping and sometimes conflicting sources of law: the Constitution, international treaties, a civil and penal code (including some family law), Islamic jurisprudence (Shari’a), and customary laws at the local level. In some areas, there are also forms of justice implemented by insurgent groups, which while part of the informal justice system, are not necessarily customary or part of traditional practices (as they often represent a more extreme approach to punishment). Issues related to women and crimes against them are often captured by a variety of these frameworks within the legal system, and it is not always clear how to disentangle relevant legal principles that may be contradictory.

Broadly speaking, differing tendencies characterize the formal and informal justice systems in Afghanistan, although regional and ethnic variations make generalizations difficult. One of the broad differences between the formal and informal justice systems is the underlying dichotomy between ensuring \textit{communal wellbeing} and protecting \textit{individual rights}. Generally, traditional dispute resolution systems within the informal justice sector have prioritised

\textsuperscript{255} Ibid.
community harmony over individual rights. By comparison, the formal civil code more often seeks to protect the rights of the individual, following international standards. Said another way, informal justice mechanisms often aim for restorative justice (where the community, household, or family remains intact), where the formal system more often utilizes retributive justice, which focuses on punishing the individual. These approaches are not always compatible, and interpretation of these systems can cause confusion. This is especially problematic for women, as many of the crimes against them take place inside the family or household, and at least within the community. Traditional justice mechanisms are likely to prioritize maintaining their existing social relations, even if it is family members who are committing crimes against them. As a result, legally enshrined women's rights may be compromised.

Within formal law, one of the most notable reforms has been the August 2009 passing of the EVAW Law, as a part of the existing penal code. The EVAW Law condemns child marriage; forced marriage; the buying and selling of women for the purpose, or under the pretext, of marriage; ‘ba’ad’ (giving away girls as payment to settle a dispute); immolation; forced self-immolation; and 16 other acts of violence, including rape and beating. Many of these practices were discussed in depth in the 2005 Gender Country Assessment. It also specifies punishments for perpetrators of the above criminalized acts. In the case of some of these acts of violence, the EVAW Law represents the first time they have been criminalized in Afghanistan. The EVAW law, however, was never passed through parliamentary vote; it bypassed Parliament and was enacted directly through presidential decree. While in Afghan law, presidential decree has the full force of law, some believe that bypassing Parliament weakened respect for the EVAW Law. As noted above under the sub-heading “Legal Rights”, this law was undergoing parliamentary review at the time of writing, with the possibility of amendments.

Where judges base their verdicts on the EVAW Law, justice for the victims is more likely than when other pre-existing parts of the criminal code are used, according to a report by the UN Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA). However, the case of the implementation of the EVAW Law is a good example of difficulties faced by the legal system regarding the application


of legislative dispositions in relation to women’s rights. While comprehensive official statistics on violence against women are not available, statistics gathered by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) from March 2010 to March 2011 can offer a snapshot of formal judiciary process in cases covered by the EVAW Law. Of the registered 2,299 incidents that could be classified as acts of violence against women under EVAW, prosecutors opened only 594 cases (26%); indictments were filed in 155 (7%), and in only 101 cases (4%) did the courts base their judgments on the EVAW Law, despite the EVAW Law having the legal status to supersede any other law that it might appear to contradict. In addition, there are only EVAW departments set up in 10 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces, leading to a situation where cases that fall under the EVAW Law are unlikely to be recognized as such in provinces without EVAW departments. Additionally, no standardized registration of cases from the police, DoWA, the prosecutors, or the courts, exists, and there is no adequate follow up on cases, as they are referred from one legal institution to another. In keeping with this track record, in 2012 Human Rights Watch reported that pursuing crimes that fall under the EVAW Law has been weak and inconsistent.

One of the most serious areas where the EVAW Law is neglected or misapplied is in cases of rape. Women who are raped are often sentenced to prison for zina (sex outside of marriage), a crime coded under Article 426-8 of the 1976 penal code. Zina is understood to mean sex that occurs outside of marriage, but is not further defined in the penal code. A report of rape is often treated as an admission of zina, and the victim is then charged. In addition, accusations of zina are made toward women who have run away, or attempted to avoid a forced marriage, etc. Individuals accused of committing rape often submit a counter-allegation of zina, trumping the rape charge. As a result, allegations of rape may never be investigated, and are easily manipulated. In 2011-12, 281 cases of zina were recorded.

While criminalizing rape, the EVAW Law does not define rape or the concept of consent, and does not discuss circumstances in which meaningful consent could not be possible (therefore negating the possibility of consent). The EVAW Law therefore leaves ambiguity around the definition of rape.
remains a crime under the criminal code, the lack of a definition of rape creates significant confusion, making it very difficult to apply the EVAW Law to punish perpetrators, and creating a strong deterrent for reporting rape. An estimated half of the female inmates in Afghan jails are convicted of zina, or moral crimes, many being victims of rape.\textsuperscript{264} Victims of rape who have been convicted of zina have in some cases then been released on the condition that they marry their rapist,\textsuperscript{265} an extra-judiciary settlement that has unfortunately been supported by the formal system in some cases. Finally, another criticism of the EVAW Law is that victims have the opportunity to withdraw their case at any time, and the state does not have a duty to investigate if a complaint is withdrawn. While the most serious crimes were intended to be exceptions to this rule, it is often applied to all crimes.\textsuperscript{266} These trends in rape and sexual assault laws demonstrate that severe violence against women continues to be of grave concern in Afghanistan, and strong improvements in legal redress have not yet been achieved.

High levels of violence against women are common in a society that suffers under high levels of general violence, crime, and impunity. In environments like this, often the most vulnerable members of society are victimized opportunistically, as there is little chance of punishment. This is a significant contributing factor to the high level of violence against women.

In addition to violence against women, other common cases involving women (often related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and custody), are challenging under the current legal system. For example, the age of marriage is a point of contention. It is defined in article 71, subsection 1, “Legal capacity for a marriage is accepted for boys when they have completed 18 years old and for girls when they have completed 16 years old”, and Article 2 of the Juvenile Code defines the age of childhood under 18 for both boys and girls. Despite this, the AIHRC estimates that approximately 57% of marriages include at least one party below the age of 16 (in contravention to both articles of the civil code).\textsuperscript{267} However, since most marriages are not officially recorded, no precise figures are available.

\textsuperscript{264} An important, and under-researched, area to explore in greater detail in the future is the female prison population. The literature does not yield any current information about the proportion of prisoners who are female, nor their crimes. In December 2006, the number of women in prison was reported to be 250.


\textsuperscript{266} “Still A Long Way to Go: Implementation of the Elimination of Violence Against Women Law in Afghanistan.” (Kabul: UNAMA/OHCHR, 2012) 12.

When it comes to divorce proceedings, the Afghanistan civil code includes stipulations that strengthen the position of women, giving them the possibility of the dissolution of marriage. However, social pressures often dissuade women from divorcing. As marriages are often not registered, and court judgment is not mandatory for divorce initiated by men, there is very little data on divorce. Indeed, many divorces are conducted verbally (when initiated by men) without any witnesses, leaving women without any documentation of the dissolution of their marriage. Cases exist where women have received undocumented divorces from their husbands, and have later been imprisoned on adultery charges for marrying another man. Though legal, the economic dimension to divorce proceedings makes it difficult for women to initiate the process. As was discussed in the previous chapter, under the subheading “Female-headed Households” (p.121), it is difficult for most women to maintain their livelihood without the support of their husband or a male guardian. Since many women are married to a member of their extended family, divorce may sever them from their entire family network. For this reason, many women may opt for mediation, in hopes of improving their situation rather than attempting divorce. In order to obtain a divorce from her husband without his consent, a woman must prove that he is violent, unable to provide for her, unable to give her children, is mentally ill, or has a substance abuse problem. As a result of these factors, women’s access to divorce is limited and they often find themselves locked in marriages they feel unable to leave.

In addition to competing legal frameworks that leave legal coding open to interpretation, and the misapplication or failure to apply laws, the problem of a lack of adequate training in the legal field is widespread. Some judges are unfamiliar with the law and do not have access to legal texts, and cases are at times decided based on personal opinion without reference to coded laws. Other legal practitioners do not have a legal background, and some are unlicensed but still practicing.268

**Traditional Justice and Informal Dispute Resolution**

As a result of some of the difficulties outlined above, many people still rely on traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, like local mullahs, *shuras* or *jirgas*. An assessment of these structures is challenging; some studies have demonstrated wide variations in the rulings of these structures with cases occasionally ruling in favor of the protection of women more strongly than the

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formal legal system often does,²⁶⁹ where other local councils have pardoned, sanctioned and even required violent and illegal acts toward women. What is clear is that traditional forms of justice are overwhelmingly more accessible to people and that they are respected. Regarded as quicker, cheaper and fairer than state-administered courts by many, they enjoy a high degree of legitimacy among men and women, and play a central role in local governance.²⁷⁰ According to a report published by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) in December 2011,²⁷¹ at least 80% of all disputes in Afghanistan are still resolved through Traditional Dispute Resolution (TDR) mechanisms. In terms of accessibility, 87% of people in the Survey of the Afghan People say that shuras/jirgas are accessible to them, and 73% say that they are effective at delivering justice, compared to only 58% who think that state justice is effective.²⁷²

Despite a variation in rulings, the continued reliance on TDR mechanisms with regards to women’s rights is often one of the biggest barriers to better and more equal representation in the legal system. Local and customary practices observed by traditional justice mechanisms are often in conflict with constitutional standards and Islamic law, and are sometimes forbidden by the Afghan civil and criminal codes.²⁷³ However, as mentioned above, the aim in resolving cases is often to maintain the stability of communal relations and household units, rather than to punish perpetrators or provide individual justice. In the interest of stability, informal justice systems may reinforce unequal power dynamics.²⁷⁴ For women, who often do not have significant power, and for whom the majority of cases are closely connected to family members, this may mean that their ability to access justice may be forfeited in favor of keeping them within their existing social relationships, no matter the positive or negative impact on the individual. The reliance on traditional justice mechanisms also makes monitoring and data collection extremely challenging regarding women’s access to justice, since the majority of their cases are still adjudicated by local councils with no formal records of cases or decisions.

²⁷³ Afghan Civil Code, Article 82.
Shelters and Emergency Aid

There are now 27 safe houses in Afghanistan in which women can seek shelter when leaving their families, four of which are in Kabul.\(^{275}\) There is limited access to legal aid (as discussed further in the below section on “Female Legal Professionals”), although providers say that an increased demand from police stations for legal representation during interrogation is a positive sign.\(^{276}\)

However, despite a woman’s shelter regulation prepared by MoWA which outlines access, safety, and support for women in shelters, shelters continue to face serious challenges in Afghanistan. Firstly, the perception of shelters by many is that they are places where immoral women go (and often that *zina*, and even prostitution, takes place there). This stands to reason when women who run away from home are often charged with the intention to commit adultery, as discussed above under the sub-heading “Crimes Against Women”. Secondly, shelters are intended to be temporary or emergency dwellings for women; however, many women have stayed in shelters for years. This is because there are few options for women to live independently and earn a livelihood (for further information, see the sub-heading “Female-headed Households”, p.118).

Female Legal Professionals

As stated above, there are now 250 – 300 lawyers providing legal aid in the country, an increase from nearly zero after the fall of the Taliban regime. However, detainees in most parts of the country still often do not have access to representation, and few of these legal aid professionals are women.\(^{277}\) In particular, women very rarely have access to a lawyer during their first interrogations.\(^{278}\) This is critical, as women have been subjected to unlawful virginity tests, intimate searches, and have been forced to sign confessions at police stations and other facilities. The presence of counsel is necessary to protect women from abuse when interfacing with the legal system.\(^{279}\) In addition, in a series of interviews in 2008 with female prisoners at Pul-e-

\(^{275}\) Information obtained from UN Women, May 2013.


\(^{277}\) Ibid, 24.

\(^{278}\) Ibid.

\(^{279}\) Ibid.
Charkhi prison, 82% said that their lawyer also had not been present during their trial.280

**Box 13: Supporting Victims of VAW**

Medica Afghanistan, among other NGOs, provides legal aid to women, taking on approximately 170 criminal cases/year and 180 civil cases/year. Since 2003, Medica has dealt with nearly 10,000 cases of women survivors of violence, whether through provision of counseling or legal aid. In addition, they provide training to police, prison staff, legal professionals, and government employees, to better equip them to deal with cases involving women's issues.

The figures below are reported in a document from 2008 by MoWA.281 There are no more recent publicly available figures to provide an accurate picture of the true number of female legal workers. The most recent available data reflects that:

- Only 73 out of the 1,547 sitting judges in Afghanistan (4.7%) are female (with no women on the Executive Council of the Supreme Court);282
- 35 (6.4%) out of the 546 prosecutors are women; and
- Women represent 6.1% (76) of the 1,241 attorneys.283

Unfortunately, the lack of female legal professionals means that many women accused of crimes or victims of violence feel unable to disclose potentially mitigating circumstances to male lawyers, out of shame or due to cultural taboos related to conversations between women and men. Women who suffer from or witness sexual abuse often do not want to share critical information with male lawyers even if it could help their case in court. With female police officers still a small minority of the ANP, and those often not reaching rural areas, the likelihood of women being able to report crimes frankly, and for them to be referred to the formal legal system, is hampered by a lack of women in key positions.

**Women and Voice**

The establishment of a democratic political system in 2004 has led to millions of women casting votes in successive rounds of elections from 2004 – 2010,
and hundreds competing as political candidates (including as presidential candidates). Due to strong quota systems put in place to ensure women’s access to political office (instituted in 2004), Afghanistan is among the countries with the highest rates of women in electable political positions in the world. Some women have also gained enough votes to win seats without the help of quotas. In addition, a few women have been awarded appointed political offices, although the quota system in effect for elected offices has been much more successful at including women, as compared to appointed offices where no quota system is in place. There is one exception, in the Upper House of Parliament (Mashrano Jirga), where a 50% quota for women exists for the President-appointed portion (one-third) of the seats.

In addition to political offices and voting, women are gaining a voice and participating in public life through increasing access to and participation in media, and as civil society activists, involved in advocacy efforts and promoting government accountability.

**Affirmative Action Measures**

A number of affirmative action policies have been established in Afghanistan’s governance system, in order to ensure that more women are in government positions. Due to these measures, Afghanistan ranks among the world’s top 20 countries for the number of women in Parliament (27% during the 2005-2010 legislative session, and 28% during the current session). The Woelsi Jirga (or Lower House) has a 27% reservation (arrived at by assuming an average of 2 seats for women per province, for a total of 68 of 249 seats as per Chapter 5, Article 83 of the Constitution). The Mashrano Jirga (or Upper House) has a quota of approximately 17% (50% of the one-third President-appointed seats), or 17 of 102 seats. There are an additional 3 seats reserved for women among the 10 Kuchi seats reserved in the Lower House. There is also a 25% quota for women at Provincial Council (PC) level, or 124 seats.

Different from statutory quotas in some other countries, the Afghan system of reserved seats is a constitutional provision to allocate actual seats to women legislators, rather than regulating the specific proportion of male and female candidates by all parties seeking parliamentary representation. The quota system has been essential for women because women face significant

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challenges running for office, and many women who have been elected would not have been able to secure the votes necessary to win their seat outright. The number of women gaining enough votes to win a seat outright has also declined from one election to the next since 2004, reinforcing the essential nature of the quota system.

Quotas also now exist for District Coordination Councils (DCCs) and Community Development Councils (CDCs), local development and governance bodies elected by communities, but not yet part of a formal decentralized government. For DCCs (formerly called District Development Assemblies or other titles, depending on the program funding them), the quota is 25%, while for CDCs, it is 50%. However, given the less formal nature of these bodies (not officially local government structures), the quotas have often been flexibly applied, where some communities have preferred not to include women and this perspective has been accommodated. As these structures move toward formalization into tiers of government as mandated in the Constitution, it is important that these quotas are formalized in order to help women enter local governance at lower levels and work their way through the system based on gaining local governance experience.

Despite its success in getting women into elected office, many believe that the system of reserved seats was misinterpreted and misapplied in both the 2004/05 and the 2009/10 parliamentary and PC election cycles. Many believed that the quotas should be used as insurance of a minimum number of women in elected office, acknowledging the considerable barriers to women winning against male competitors for open seats. However, if women did receive more votes than men, they should be allocated open seats, meaning that there could be more than the reserved quota of women in elected bodies. But the law was not clear on how the quota should be applied. As a result, the quota ended up being filled by the female candidates with the highest number of votes, regardless of whether they could have won seats outright against male candidates. Rather than the quota distinguishing “open” seats from reserved seats for women, it has been applied as dividing “men’s” seats from “women’s” seats, as if seats were also reserved for men. In the 2005 parliamentary elections, a fairly high proportion of women (30%) won their seats outright by gaining the highest number of votes among all candidates.

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287 Ibid.
regardless of the reserved seat system.\textsuperscript{289} They were included in the 68 reserved seats, while male candidates who received fewer votes were allocated seats among the unreserved portion. In this scenario, the quota system was perversely reversed, such that men actually benefited from the quotas, taking up seats when they did not receive the highest numbers of votes. This application methodology needs to be revisited to ensure that the quota system does not in the future actually cap the number of women taking up political office.

**National Governance Structure**

As of the 2009 PC elections, there are 27\% women in the Meshrano Jirga (28 seats), well above the quota (though it took until 2011 to confirm the seats). As mentioned above, the President nominates one-third of the seats in the Upper House (34 seats), 50\% of which must be women; constitutionally, the other two-thirds of the Upper House should be elected among Provincial Councillors and District Councillors (at one-third each), with each PC nominating 1 member to the Parliament (for a total of 34), and the District Councils of each province nominating 1 member (for another total of 34). However, without official District Councils to date, two-thirds of the Upper House seats come from the Provincial Councillors (therefore, 2 per council rather than 1 per council).

While the 2004 Constitution guarantees women at least 2 seats per province in the Wolesi Jirga (for a total of 68 seats), in practice this has been organized as a proportionate distribution across provinces based on population size. For example, in sparsely populated provinces like Nimroz, 1 of 2 seats (50\%) is reserved for a woman, while in densely-populated Kabul, 9 of the provinces 33 seats (27\%) are reserved. As of the 2010 parliamentary elections, there are 28\% women in the Lower House, one seat above the quota.

In addition, there are 3 appointed female members of the current Cabinet, including the Minister of Public Health, Minister of Women’s Affairs, and the Minister of Social Affairs, Martyrs, and the Disabled.

**Provincial Governance Structure**

The number of seats that make up each PC is determined based on population, ranging between 9 and 29 seats across the country. According to the

Constitution, 25% of PC seats must be reserved for women. However, the Electoral Law of 2009 confirmed that the quota figure would be 124 out of the 420 PC seats nationwide, approximately 25% per province, but nearly 30% of the total. In the 2009 PC elections (which occurred simultaneously with the presidential election), 117 seats were allocated to women, leaving 7 vacant.

While the PCs are important as they represent the lowest level of formally elected representatives, their mandate is as yet unclear, and has been primarily consultative. In some governance systems, elected bodies at subnational levels have budgetary oversight and approval responsibilities, along with other strong decision-making roles in their constituency. However, in the Afghan system, power is weighted toward appointed political offices rather than elected bodies. At subnational levels, governors at both provincial and district levels typically have more influence than PC members, a structural issue that weakens citizen representation and often leaves the PCs without clear roles to perform.

**Voting System and Political Agenda-setting**

Afghanistan’s election uses a Single Non-transferrable Vote (SNTV) system. In this system, citizens vote for candidates directly at all levels rather than any form of indirect voting, and the candidates with the highest number of votes are allocated the available seats for their constituency. A majority of votes is not required to win a seat, and votes for an individual candidate do not contribute toward votes for a party or national leader. SNTV systems are rare around the world, but this method was chosen for Afghanistan partly because of the simplicity of vote-tallying when every vote is direct. Another reason this system was chosen was because political parties are seen as exacerbating ethnic tensions and as having been historically problematic due to external support and allegiances (i.e. to the former Soviet Union).

In an SNTV system, there is less incentive to work closely with a political party, since each candidate must win as an independent and majority percentages of votes are not needed to win a seat. These factors encourage candidates to focus on very local interests and employ identity politics, to garner enough votes to surpass other candidates. This system tends to keep politicians fractured and independent, since broad support (typically garnered through parties and coalitions) is not needed. Given the social structure of Afghanistan, the system puts women at a disadvantage for contesting open seats, as their social connections, public persona, and personal wealth are likely to be more limited.
than those of male candidates.

In addition to the individualistic nature of SNTV, the system also creates a disincentive for individual candidates and parties to develop clear policy platforms, engage in issues-based politics, and create thematic coalitions between parties, since votes are often secured based on personal connections and patronage relationships. Even though political parties exist and play a role in elections in Afghanistan (promoting candidates and working to garner support), candidates must rely more on personal name-recognition, and less on the policy agenda of the party with which they associate. This in some way limits the likelihood of a strong women’s rights agenda developing with the backing of a party or coalition of parties, as members tend to pursue identity-based politics, voting along ethnic or other lines in Parliament.

**Women in the 2004-5 and 2009-10 Election Cycles**

In the 2004-5 elections, there was 1 female presidential candidate, and 335 female parliamentary candidates ran for election, of a total of 2,709 candidates, while 247 female PC candidates ran out of a total of 3,027 candidates. Despite the high number of candidates, 5 PC reserved seats were still left vacant, with a total of 119 women elected. Women won a surprising number of seats outright, regardless of the reservations provided; in total 19 female parliamentary candidates and 29 female PC candidates won seats by getting more direct votes than their male counterparts. While many of these women were in the Central or Western regions, at least one woman in each region won her seat outright. Although these seats were allocated within the quota rather than in addition to it, in Kabul more women won parliamentary seats than the quota had reserved, which actually expanded the number of women over and above the quota. Some felt the surprisingly strong showing of women could be partly explained as a form of voter protest against the high number of male candidates who were known to be involved in wartime violence and/or known to hold illicit businesses.

In the 2004-05 election, women voters made up a record-high proportion of the total, topping 41% of voters. Unfortunately, election observers reported cases where they saw very few women voting at polling stations in some locales yet ballot boxes from female polling stations still coming back full from

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those areas. For example, in insecure and socially conservative Paktika province, 60% of registered voters were allegedly women, although polling station observers did not see high numbers of women voting. Paktika’s similar neighboring province, Zabul, registered only 3.7% female voters.\(^{(292)}\) Cases like this imply that women’s votes were manipulated, but the extent to which this happened is unknown. Despite this, the 2004-5 election cycle was hailed as a success internationally, and although there were some claims of fraud, it appears that women still voted in high numbers.

In comparison to the 2004-5 elections, the 2009 presidential and PC elections and the 2010 parliamentary elections were mired with difficulties. Overall voter turn-out has been on the decline, from 7.3 million people in the presidential elections of 2004, down to 4.2 million in the 2010 parliamentary elections. In keeping with the trend, female voters have declined incrementally since 2004, falling to 39% of all voters in the 2009 and 2010 elections. However, it is difficult to say how accurate the voter turn-out figures are. In the 2009-10 election cycle, men registering and voting for women was recorded at higher levels than in 2004-05, especially in the South and East, where the voter registration levels for women reached rather unlikely numbers.\(^{(293)}\) In some provinces, female voter registration reached 50-60% of all registration, implausible or impossible figures, especially because the highest numbers were often recorded in provinces which are most restrictive for women. While the extent of the fraud is difficult to determine, it is clear that the voter registration of women was highly manipulated. This is particularly easy to do since women were not mandated to have photos on the ID used for voter registration.\(^{(294)}\)

Two of the presidential candidates in 2009 were women. In the 2010 parliamentary elections, female candidates increased by 33% over the previous parliamentary elections, with 406 candidates (15.7%). However, only 12 were elected outright without the assistance of quotas, a decrease of 7 as compared to 2005.\(^{(295)}\) Female parliamentarians increased slightly from the previous legislative session, to a total of 69 (or 28%). For the PCs in 2009, there were 328 candidates (of a total of 3,193), also a slight increase over the

\(^{(292)}\) Ibid, 33.


\(^{(294)}\) Ibid, 22.

2004 PC elections,\textsuperscript{296} with 117 elected. However, despite the overall increase in candidates, the proportion of women candidates decreased in 14 of the 34 provinces,\textsuperscript{297} mainly for security reasons and pressure to withdraw.\textsuperscript{298}

**Challenges for Female Candidates and Voters**

In the past two election cycles, and particularly for the 2009-10 elections, significant challenges have emerged for female candidates and female voters. Women candidates have consistently reported harassment, intimidation, security threats, attacks, and lack of protection on the campaign trail. Due to intimidation and threats, the MoI proposed to provide female candidates with bodyguards, following pressure from the Independent Election Commission’s (IEC) gender unit and international actors. This measure, however, was poorly implemented, and many candidates did not receive the promised protection. Women candidates also typically had fewer resources to spend on polling observers, and counting of votes took place at the local level (instead of at provincial centers), where female candidates had very sparse resources to use on monitoring.\textsuperscript{299} Female candidates were therefore likely disproportionately affected by fraud.\textsuperscript{300}

Female voters suffered from a lack of female polling station attendants. Men ended up staffing approximately one fourth of positions at women’s polling stations, and 650 women’s polling sites did not open at all.\textsuperscript{301} Polling stations were also located too far from home, or were not set up in a “woman-friendly” way, such that women had to pass lines of male voters to reach their voting section. As mentioned, women’s IDs were used for “proxy voting”, where men voted more than once by voting on behalf of women. In many ways, the gap between women’s legal rights and their practical ability to realize those rights was exploited for fraud, with men registering and voting on behalf of women, stuffing ballot boxes for ghost women’s polling stations, etc.\textsuperscript{302} Women also struggle with a lack of access to information, and more limited social


\textsuperscript{297} The proportion decreased in Kabul, Kapisa, Parwan, Balkh, Baghlan, Kunduz, Takhar and Ghor. Both the proportion and the number of women standing for election decreased in Bamyan, Laghman, Kandahar, Ghazni, Badakhshan and Herat.


\textsuperscript{300} Ibid, 16.

\textsuperscript{301} Ibid, 15.

interactions and networks, creating a barrier to educated independent voting. Some women complained that their husbands refused to talk to them about politics at home, so they were unable to learn about the candidates.303

Even for women who vote, attitudes prevail that men should be able to influence the decision-making process of women at the polls. The Asia Foundation Survey of the Afghan People 2011 found that close to half of the respondents (49%) believe that men should somehow be involved in women’s voting decision-making process, through direct advice or consultation.304 Other studies have noted other decision-making processes around voting. In many cases, communities reach consensus and choose to vote together, but women are typically not involved in the consensus-making discussions. There have also been cases where women reported that their mother-in-law organized the women in their family/household to vote for a particular candidate.

**Box 14: Leadership and Advocacy Training**

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has been working to strengthen electoral systems and citizen participation in Afghanistan since 2002, through voter outreach and women’s advocacy training, among other initiatives. Voter outreach has included TV and radio programming, public service announcements, billboards, and other media aimed at increasing women’s participation in elections. Advocacy training has targeted women of influence across 14 locations in 6 provinces, to support them to better reach out to others with information on their right to vote, legislative processes, and women’s rights agendas in politics, among other issues. The training is a 6-month program, and includes advocacy meetings with government officials, outreach to communities, and publicized radio and TV roundtable discussions. In the 4 years IFES has been working with women advocates, it has trained 1,800 women, and in 2012, trainees reached out to 252,427 others. In selected provincial centers, IFES has implemented joint advocacy programs, introducing women’s rights advocacy to both women and men, in recognition of the social capital held by many men in Afghanistan and their central role in influencing others to embrace women’s rights. Many former trainees are now members of parliament, provincial council members, and other government officials, along with civil society advocates.

Another influencing factor in the latest elections was the 2010 amendment of the Electoral Law, in ways that are potentially damaging for women. Where previously a reserved seat was left vacant if there was no female candidate, the law was amended to allow men to fill “women’s seats” left vacant at both parliamentary and PC level. This opens up the possibility of women being intimidated out of their seats. There is also a new requirement that all

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government employees that wish to run for office must resign from their positions permanently (therefore, not receiving their positions back if they are not successful in the elections). This rule includes teachers. Since the civil service and teaching are significant areas of employment for women, they may be hesitant to risk resigning in order to run for office.\textsuperscript{305} Finally, the law increased the cost of registering as a candidate by three-fold, a financial barrier that is likely to disproportionately affect women.

**District Governance**

At district level, MRRD’s National Area-Based Development Program (NABDP) has established DDAs in 388 districts of the country (96% of districts). DDAs are intended to oversee the development process in their district, but are not formal government bodies with formal elections. Despite informal status, DDAs have in many districts been effective drivers of development processes. MRRD aims to increase women’s participation in decision-making in these councils, and quota systems have been adopted in the establishment of DDAs (ideally 30%). To date, 3,040 women are DDA members.

One of the key challenges at district level is the recurring problem of mobility, where rural women are required to travel significant distances to participate in district level meetings. Female provincial councillors are often from more urban areas and so manage to perform their duties from urban settings, while community level councillors are able to participate in their home communities. The district level, however, presents a particular challenge for women (delegated from village councils in rural areas) to actively participate in district level discussions, meetings, and decision-making. Another issue is that of “official” participation (where women are selected and registered), as compared to “active” participation (where women attend meetings regularly, participate in discussions and decisions, and have access to and knowledge of the majority of the DDA’s activities and information). This latter challenge is difficult to measure, but anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a significant gap between official and active participation in some districts.

DDAs are likely to undergo a structural change, transitioning to DCCs (along with other pre-existing councils at district level). The mandates of DCCs will expand, moving closer to the constitutionally-mandated District Councils,

which will be officially part of the government. DCCs have a quota of 25% women.

The district governors are appointed by the central government, and to date, there is one woman (of 364 district governors) holding this post, in Jawzjan province. Since there is a reasonably high number of women who run for elected office at subnational levels, it is difficult to justify why there is only 1 appointed female district governor. This is an issue to which the central Government needs to give more attention and commitment, perhaps considering establishing a quota for female district governors. However, now that district governors are required to pass a standardized test, some longstanding power-holders have been unseated, a process that could make space for more women in the future.

**Community Governance**

At community level, MRRD oversees the NSP, a program approaching national coverage which establishes CDCs and channels development funds through them to communities. Like the DDAs, the CDCs are locally elected/selected and are responsible to prioritize, select, and oversee development projects. There are now more than 30,000 CDCs in Afghanistan, covering more than 70% of
 CDCs have gradually taken on increasing responsibilities in many communities, expanding to further governance roles, and merging with or replacing pre-existing traditional councils in some areas. Through an ongoing randomized impact assessment, MRRD is monitoring 387 NSP communities across the country through qualitative focus groups and quantitative data collection over time. The first report from this assessment notes that 75% of male community members and 88% of female community members consider the CDC to be the main decision-making body for governance and development.

According to MRRD, the participation of women in CDCs has gradually increased since the program’s inception in 2003. As of 2013, 34% of CDC members (343,843) are women (117,536), and on average, women comprise around 27% of membership per CDC. Disaggregated by district, the proportion of female CDC members ranges from 0% to 53%. Provinces with CDCs which have more than 50% female members include Badakhshan, Bamyan, Nangarhar, Balkh, Kabul, Daikundi, and Faryab. Provinces with CDCs which have 0% female members include Kandahar, Paktia, Kunar, Khost and Uruzgan.

Given the informal nature of CDCs as governance bodies, there have been wide variations in election practice and CDC structure. In a detailed paper on the subject in 2008, 8 types of election practices were identified, resulting in 4 types of CDCs, typically distinguished by gendered practices. Types of elections included separate direct-voting elections for candidates (one election for women and one for men); clustered elections, where groups of households nominate a representative candidate (sometimes one male, one female); joint elections with quotas for women which mirror the provincial and national processes; and elections without any women involved at all (either as candidates or as voters). Sometimes men voted only for men and women only for women, where other times both men and women cast votes for male and female candidates. In other cases, each voter cast 1 vote for 1 candidate, regardless of gender. The result of these varied election practices is a variety of CDC structures that differ in how they include women.

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306 “Gender in Development: Local Self Governance Institutions and the Participation of Women in Afghanistan (A Pilot Study).” (Kabul: Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, 2012).
The NSP has increasingly standardized these processes and structures, and also now has a requirement that 50% of CDC members will be women (a new quota established in 2012); these can sit in a mixed council or in separate committees. However, districts that are classified by NSP as “high risk” are not subject to these rules, and this now constitutes 33% of the country. In the future, as village-level government is formalized, it is important that quota systems are not seen as optional, but are standardized for each community. According to a number of studies on the impact of NSP, communities (both men and women) participating in NSP are more likely to perceive women as having a role to play in community decision-making. It also appears that participation in NSP brings women greater mobility and greater interaction with each other (the strengthening of social networks). In general, NSP appears to have had the effect of creating space for women in community decision-making and leadership, normalizing a process of consultation that may not have been present before.

310 “Does Women’s Participation in the National Solidarity Programme Make a Difference in their Lives? A Case Study in Balkh Province.” (Kabul: Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2012).
While the program has struggled with the same issue discussed above in relation to DDAs (the discrepancy between official and active participation of women), it has been somewhat easier to facilitate more active participation due to the decreased challenges of mobility at community level. NSP meetings take place in home communities, and NSP projects are implemented locally. However, the majority of CDCs still have separate men’s and women’s meetings, creating a challenge for the sharing of information and the normalized participation of women. In some cases, it appears that there is limited cooperation between the male and female committees, and that they exist along parallel tracks. Some women CDC members have even noted that they have never been told the amount of funds that was allocated to the community.311 The vast majority of CDCs select a male Treasurer, so funding decisions and ownership are almost always more with men than with women. Mobility constraints related to the procurement of project materials and contracting of services for projects affect women’s participation as well.

**Women in the Peace Process**

Women participated in Afghanistan’s two foundational Loya Jirgas (in 2002 and 2003), aimed at establishing the post-Taliban political system and proposing a Constitution. In 2002, 12% of the delegates were women, and this figure rose to 20% in 2003. However, various high level events and bodies have had a varied track record on including women. For example, the London Conference in 2010 took place without any official Afghan female delegates, while the Peace Jirga in Kabul the same year saw women’s representation reach 21%. Currently 9 of the 70 members of the High Peace Council are women (12%). Women’s groups are advocating for 30%, which would be a total of 21.312 While women have been included in various conferences both in and outside of Afghanistan, many women are concerned that political settlements will be reached in private negotiations between the predominantly male parties to the conflict, and that key “red lines” on women’s rights and access to services will be compromised. Some fear that the space to be heard and to implement pro-women policies will be used as a bargaining chip in a potential power-sharing deal.313

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311 Ibid, 17.
Security for Female Public Figures

A list of high profile female public figures have been attacked or assassinated, including Safia Amajan, head of the Kandahar DoWA in 2006, Malalai Kakar, the most senior police officer in Kandahar in 2008, Zakia Zaki and Sanga Amaj, journalists killed in 2007, the assassination of Kandahar Provincial Council Member, Sitara Achakzai, in 2008, the Head of the Department of Women’s Affairs in Nangarhar, in 2012, and Shaima Rezayee, journalist and tv moderator in 2005. In the latest round of elections in 2009-10, some women were not able to campaign at all, given the security environment in their constituency. As noted in other chapters, security continues to limit women’s participation and access, both in general, and as particular targets for those who oppose their participation in various aspects of public life.

Women and Communication Technology

In Afghanistan, access to media sources for information has increased significantly. Both men and women listen to the radio about the same amount, where 89% of the rural population and 85% of the urban population report having a radio. In urban areas, 89% of people have television, which usurps radio as a primary information source; however, in rural areas, this percentage drops to 26%. More than 70% of Afghans have mobile phones, and mobile phone coverage has increased 100% since 2005. Male and female cell phone users are close to equal (38% and 33% respectively), and 40% of all users are between the ages of 15-24 years old. Overall, approximately 80% of women have some access to a mobile phone (whether personal or shared). Of those who owned their own mobile phone, 67% had obtained it in the last 2 years, and of those who obtained a mobile phone in the last 1 year, 64% were under the age of 25. However, there continues to be a significant difference between rural and urban areas; only 26% of all users are in rural areas. Internet access is still limited, at only 2%.

316 Ibid, 18.
318 Ibid.
Policy Implications

As can be seen from the foregoing chapter, women’s access to justice has not significantly improved since 2005. A serious coordinated donor and Government partnership is needed in order to make a notable improvement on such a protracted issue. Women have seen some gains in political participation and social voice although challenges persist, and gains are at risk of receding. Recommendations for improving women’s access to justice, political and social voice include:

1. **Continued Legal Reform** – Pass the EVAW Law through Parliament, the newly drafted Family Law and the amended Land Reform Law, expanding legal reforms that provide greater rights for women.

2. **Female Legal Professionals and the ANP** – Invest in female legal professionals of various kinds. Invest in significant reform within the ANP and further empower FRUs to address gender-based violence cases as criminal cases.

3. **Greater Awareness of the EVAW Law and Other Progressive Jurisprudence** – Since an estimated 80% of cases are still adjudicated by traditional justice mechanisms, and awareness within the formal legal system is at times low, support is needed to gain a greater awareness of the prevailing legal systems and provisions that better protect women.

4. **Data Collection** – Develop a central database to record all relevant cases of crimes that are codified under the EVAW Law (to be expanded to capture laws codified under future legislation), such that cases can be systematically followed up, and the processing and outcomes of cases can be analyzed.

5. **Support to a Legal Social Safety Net** – Support shelters and their expansion to new provinces, along with greater availability of legal aid. Help shelters develop training, skills development, and other strategies that can help women safely and sustainably leave shelters.

6. **Expand and Reform Quotas** – Reform the quota system to clarify women’s reserved seats vs. openly-contested seats, allowing women to take up seats beyond the allocated quota if they win their seats outright. In addition, as District and Village Councils become more formalized in future, ensure the establishment of a formal quota system at those levels.

7. **Support Party Platforms that could Embrace Women’s Issues Collectively and Support Female Candidates** – Provide support to
both female and male reformist candidates and elected representatives to develop coalition positions around women’s rights and development issues.

8. **Consider Further Affirmative Action Measures Beyond Quotas** – Implement measures to help women with logistical barriers to participation in public life, including transportation support, personal security, and access to information, among other support.

9. **Establish a Target for Women in Appointed Positions** – The Government should set minimum targets for appointing women to governor and mayoral appointed positions.
Chapter 6: Conclusion
For Afghanistan, the inclusion of women and the improvement of women’s development indicators are critical to the country’s overall well-being. From the literature it can be seen that gender equality is smart economics. The main message of The World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development (WDR)\(^{320}\) is that gender equality matters for development, because it is a core development objective in its own right, but also because gender equality is good for the economy – gender equality can raise productivity and improve other development outcomes for all citizens, strengthening prospects for the next generation, and contributing to more representative decision-making in societies.\(^{321}\) Gender equality is a long-term driver of competitiveness and equity, a benefit that is even more important in the midst of global economic crisis (and Afghanistan’s 2014 transition, with its slow decline of external aid). Economies with greater gender equality face fewer demographic stresses, and invest a much larger percentage of GDP in human capital for current and future generations. Countries that reduce gender disparities, especially in education and access to employment and markets, will have an advantage over those that delay or avoid action. Afghanistan cannot afford to fall further behind because it is failing to enable women and men to participate equally in the economy and society.


Women’s rights, development, and participation in society have been central to the agenda of international involvement in Afghanistan, and the Government of Afghanistan has undergone significant reforms and expansion of services that have targeted and benefited women and girls. As this report has demonstrated, these efforts have in some cases achieved quite dramatic results in a short period of time. Strong results for women and girls can be seen in Health (Chapter 2), Education (Chapter 3), and Public Voice (second portion of Chapter 5). At the same time, the report has also highlighted areas where significant improvement has been lacking, and a systematic approach to addressing some issues is still missing. This can be seen in the section on Legal Rights (first portion of Chapter 5), and in the chapter on Work and Employment (Chapter 4).

In addition, given the current political timeline in Afghanistan, with progressive withdrawal of international security forces, and a future decline in aid, gains made in services and participation for women could be at risk. Drawing on the report’s sectoral analyses, the below overall observations can be made regarding critical factors for sustaining gains and pushing forward to narrow gaps between women and men in Afghanistan.

**Challenges to Sustain Achievements Post-2014 and Recommendations**

**A Political Settlement Must Advance Gains for Women.** In the key interviews undertaken to prepare this report, various development, humanitarian, and advocacy actors expressed concerns about the potential for women’s place in society being used as a bargaining chip in a political settlement. Strongest concerns were expressed about the education and justice systems, and the contested space they represent. A political settlement is closely linked to security, which has been highlighted above as a major deterrent to women’s access and participation. However, if greater stability is gained but rights are compromised to gain it, women may not be able to benefit from a more secure environment. In addition, concerns were expressed that whatever the political arrangements and commitments, the capacity to implement provisions for women and maintain the Rule of Law may deteriorate.

**Security Underpins Development and Participation for Women Across Sectors.** In Afghanistan, lack of security remains one of the key barriers to women’s access to services and attainment of societal participation. As the foregoing chapters have demonstrated, security concerns affect women’s and
girls’ access to health and education, their mobility, their comfort in public places and in the workplace, their physical safety, their ability to participate in public life, and their psychological well-being. An analysis of the NRVA 2007/08 regarding the linkage between service delivery and security suggests that the opportunity cost for girls, for whom the risk of violence-related harm is perceived as higher, increases disproportionately with conflict, leading households to invest relatively more in boys/men. For example, girls’ education rates correlate strongly with security concerns, as do child health outcomes, where areas with the strongest security problems consistently generate the worst results against these indicators. Good security overall proved to be a significant predictor of children's educational and health outcomes, positively correlated to literacy rates, school enrollment, and provision of vital health services (i.e. vaccinations and vitamin A supplementation). Specifically girls’ educational attainments were disproportionately worse in highly insecure areas. Partly because of the variation in security around the country, there are strong regional variances in access to services. The above analysis is based on the NRVA 2007/08; however, since then the security situation in some previously-secure areas has further deteriorated.

**Within Declining Aid, More Internal Resources Must Be Allocated to Women’s Needs.** Another challenge to sustaining achievements to date and expanding them further will be to secure government funding to commit to programming that benefits women. The sustainability and expansion of services developed to date is critical, and external resources are set to gradually decline at a time when programs need to be built upon and scaled up. The programs in place at the moment have not yet reached their intended commitments, particularly to women and girls, and must continue to expand further to do so (for example, there are still education and health facilities with no female staff, still high numbers of out-of-school children, and still extensive work needed in the justice sector). Developing sustainable resources to maintain the development effort and push forward in lacking areas will be a key challenge for the years to come.

**Female Human Resources are Critical for Women Across Sectors.** As the report notes across chapters, one of the recurring themes throughout is the

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322 "Interactive Data Visualization and Analysis on Wellbeing, Conflict and Access to Services" (PowerPoint presentation for the inter-Ministry meeting of the Poverty Analysis and Policy Committee meeting). World Bank, October 10, 2012.

323 Ibid.
negative effect of a lack of qualified female professionals in key sectors. In health, women have a more difficult time accessing healthcare and medical information where there are no or not enough female midwives, nurses, and doctors; in education, girls are often not permitted to attend school, especially in the higher grades, if there is no female teacher to instruct them; as related to employment, women face challenges in the workplace or struggle to develop successful businesses because they must operate in an environment with few women and without a strong professional network; in the justice sector, women have difficulty reporting cases or receiving due process, without qualified women to report to and be assisted by. A lack of qualified female professionals across all sectors contributes to a negative cycle that prevents other women from accessing services and participating in public life. Further workforce planning and human resource development is critical across sectors, linking higher education systems to various other sectors for cooperative planning. Affirmative action measures are needed to recruit students into key fields from far-flung provinces, with the requirement that they must practice in their home province upon completion of their training. This is particularly critical for women. Other provisions, such as secure accommodation and competitive salary packages are also needed to incentivize professionals in resource-rich areas to serve in areas of most need.

**Targeted Action is Needed to Address Geographic Inequality.** As mentioned above, an issue related to human resources is the uneven distribution of qualified personnel in general, and in particular of female professionals, around the country. As various chapters in this report have highlighted, women are strongly represented in some sectors in Kabul and other urban areas, but are virtually absent from remote or highly insecure areas. This is a difficult cycle to break; in those regions girls are likely to have less access to education, and therefore are less likely to attain professional qualifications. It is equally challenging to incentivize professional women from other places (i.e. urban centers) to go to work in very remote or insecure areas to fill this gap. Afghanistan needs creative solutions for training female professionals from challenging areas, and strongly incentivizing professionals from other places to go to difficult areas as well.

**Engage the Religious Establishment in Key Issues of Women’s Participation.** They are still the people which communities are most likely to look to for advice and guidance in many areas, and as such are a critical community to be engaged in these processes.
Women’s Access to Justice Requires Concerted Effort, Given Slow Progress. Although it has been treated in chapter 5 in particular, violence against women is also a cross-cutting issue. High levels of violence against women, along with social stigma, can cause physical and psychological impact, which impedes women’s ability to pursue other opportunities across sectors. In this way, the issues explored in the first portion of Chapter 5 (“Legal Rights”) are critical to all other sections as well.
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Annex I: Key Areas for Future Research/Data Collection

As this report has highlighted, some issues women face in Afghanistan are still poorly understood and difficult to analyze due to a lack of data and other information. The key areas in particular need of further work are:

- women's mental health;
- women’s and girls’ nutrition;
- alleged poisoning and other attacks on girls’ education facilities;
- measuring women’s work;
- challenges women face in the private sector;
- workforce planning models (to gain gender parity and geographical balance of trained professionals); and
- women’s experience with various levels of the justice system (formal and informal).